

# The Marginalization of a *Dalit* Martial Race in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Western India

PHILIP CONSTABLE

**R**EPEATEDLY IN INDIAN RECRUITMENT HANDBOOKS and army histories of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, self-sufficiency, physical and moral resilience, orderliness and hard work, fighting tenacity, and above all, a sense of courage and loyalty were the characteristics attributed to the Indian martial races. Thus Major-General George MacMunn wrote of the Sikhs:

As a fighting man his slow wit and dogged courage give him many of the characteristics of the British soldier at his best.

(1911, 9–40)

Of the Pathans, he wrote:

Hardy, active, alert, and inured to war, are these clansmen of the Afghan hills, endowed with considerable courage when well-led, and capable of much élan. To the best type of Englishman their open, irresponsible manner and delight in all exercise and sport, with their constant high spirits, appeal greatly, and certain types of Englishmen appeal to them also.

(147–48)

Lieutenant-Colonel Eden Vansittart reflected on the same characteristics in the Gurkhas, which justified their inclusion among the martial races:

As compared with other Orientals, Gurkhas are bold, enduring, faithful, frank, very independent and self-reliant . . . . They despise the natives of India, and look up to and fraternize with Europeans, whom they admire for their superior knowledge, strength and courage, and whom they imitate in dress and habits.

(1906, 58)

Philip Constable is Senior Lecturer in Asian History in the Department of Historical and Critical Studies at the University of Central Lancashire, Britain. He may be reached at [pconstable@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:pconstable@uclan.ac.uk).

*The Journal of Asian Studies* 60, no. 2 (May 2001):439–478.

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The martial race par excellence, however, was the Rajputs. Captain A. H. Bingley stated:

The Rajput race is the noblest and proudest in India . . . . They form a military aristocracy of a feudal type. They are brave and chivalrous, keenly sensitive to an affront, and especially jealous of the honour of their women. In disposition they are manly, simple, honest, and as a rule have none of the cunning and intrigue of the Brahman. The chief characteristics of the true Rajput are pride of race and inordinate extravagance. In Rajputana . . . the chieftains of this tribe have ruled from time immemorial and he feels himself free and a member of the ruling race. In no part of the world has the devotion of soldiers to their immediate chiefs been more remarkable than among the Rajputs.

(1898, 162)

“Brave and chivalrous,” “manly, simple, honest,” “jealous of their honour,” “free and a member of the ruling race,” “pride of race,” and “devotion to their chiefs”: these were the characteristics to which many British military officers looked in recruiting the martial races of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century India. These were also the characteristics of Mahar soldiers in the nineteenth-century Bombay Army, who were regarded by caste Hindus as “untouchables” (now known as *dalits*).<sup>1</sup> Henry Baden-Powell wrote of the Mahar soldiers:

In appearance, they were able-bodied and muscular, many of them handsome, intelligent and quick to assimilate, and possessing physical courage.

(1896, 114)

Yet despite their military achievement and martial characteristics, from 1892 these Mahar soldiers (as well as Mang soldiers, who were also considered to be “untouchable”) were no longer recruited into the Bombay Army, prohibited from further enlistment, and reclassified as a non-martial race.

Much subsequent military historiography has tended to reflect this reclassification and has placed its primary focus on the high-caste nature of sepoy recruits in East India Company armies, or on the rise of the so-called “martial races” of the presidency armies after the 1857 revolt. With one notable exception (Cohen 1969), earlier historical works of the 1970s on colonial Indian armies, such as those by Philip Mason (1974), Tony Heathcote (1974), and Stephen Cohen (1971), have provided only limited analysis of *dalit* recruitment, changing attitudes to *dalit* soldiers, and the articulation by *dalit* sepoys of their changing ideological and martial perspectives. While other analyses, such as those of R. C. Majumdar (1963) and Eric Stokes (1978; 1986) on the 1857 revolt, or R. Mukherjee’s (1984) study of deserters from the 22nd Bengal Infantry in 1824, have contextualized Indian sepoys of the nineteenth century more closely in Indian rural society, Gautam Bhadra (1985) has suggested that such analyses still tend to emphasize the *zamindari* (large landlord) or *taluqdari* (smaller landed proprietor) base of sepoys involved in revolts, rather than examine lower-status subaltern sepoys.

<sup>1</sup>The title *dalit* (meaning “oppressed” or “downtrodden” in Marathi) was chosen by the Mahar community in the late twentieth century to replace the word *asprishya*, or “untouchable.” Although the low-caste reformer Phule used the word in a general sense, it is to some degree prochronistic in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is, however, used in this article as a characterization that suggests consciousness against discrimination on the basis of untouchability.

More recent works of the 1990s have sought to recover and detail more exactly the social backgrounds, lifestyles, and social perspectives of Indian sepoys in the nineteenth century. James Hoover (1994), for example, has suggested that it was not generally *zamindars'* sons who supplied recruits to East India Company armies after the Maratha wars (1775–1819). Instead, many smaller independent cultivators or sub-letting tenants of *zamindari*-caste families in Awadh sought recruitment in order to secure military income to maintain their economic status in the face of population pressure on land and land fragmentation. Seema Alavi has also revised the conventional perception of the East India Company armies before 1857 as based solely on high-caste *zamindari* peasant soldiers from Bihar, Benares, and Awadh, by revealing the diversity of modes of recruitment in the different regions of East India Company expansion in north India: for example the mixture of Mughal, Maratha, and European practice among Rohilla and Afghan cavalry in the Doab, the Eurasian James Skinner's (1778–1841) blend of Mughal and European military practice around Aligarh, and the Company's invention of its own Gurkha tradition after 1815 (Alavi 1995). Following chronologically from Alavi's analysis, David Omissi (1991, 1994), in his analysis of sepoy life and the martial-race basis of recruitment between 1860 and 1940, has also argued that the British garrison state in India depended on selective recruitment of indigenous martial collaborators in the Indian army, especially "from the 'subaltern' classes of Indian society—above all from the middle peasants of the Punjab, who provided the bulk of the Indian Army sepoys from the 1880s" and who were attracted by mercenary incentives and perpetuation of their martial honor (*izzat*) (1994, 234). Although all these analyses have substantially broadened understanding of sepoy life and recruitment, *dalit* sepoys still however find little place or voice in this current military historiography of India.

Dirk Kolff's study of the military labor market of north India from the sixteenth to early nineteenth centuries has, however, given some degree of support to an emphasis on the social heterogeneity of East India Company soldiers which could potentially include many lower-caste soldiers (1990). Kolff argues that recruitment of armed peasants to Afghan, Mughal, and early British colonial armies in north India was based on military *naukari*, or service to a *mansabdar*/notable, military entrepreneur, or local *zamindar* who recruited and supplied peasant troopers for the military labor markets. Within these warbands, ethnic divisions, social or caste status, and clan loyalties were substantially mitigated by a heterodox and eclectic recruitment based on martial merit and the assumption by the peasant recruits of Afghan or Rajput status/identity as a professional soldier and member of their military recruiters' warband. Qualifying the conventional characterization of the early East India Company sepoys as simply high-caste Hindu "yeomen" with the suggestion that their social status was an assumed identity associated with military *naukari*, Kolff clearly understands many armed peasant-soldiers to have been well below the economic level of *zamindar* or tenant *talukdars*. He argues that they may have initially included many "Rajput" Hindu clans like the Baheliya Karauls of the Benares region or the Baheliya Pasi of the United Provinces, who were later to be marginalized and excluded from the army on the basis of being low-caste shudras.

The general neglect of *dalit* sepoys in historical literature on Indian armies has in part been countered in the study of western India by detailed analyses of *dalit* protest. These analyses have commented on Mahar exclusion from the Bombay Army as a prelude to their main analytical focus on the post-1920s Ambedkarite *dalit* liberation movement (Omvedt 1990; Gokhale 1993; Zelliot 1996). Post-Ambedkar *dalit* historians writing in Marathi about their prior military history (Kamble 1980; Thorat 1954; Bhavare 1980; Pawar 1982) and historians of *dalit* military history

(Longer 1981; Basham 1980) have also sought to record the history of *dalit* soldiers. Much of this difficult recovery of *dalit* military history from disparate archives is a growing corrective to the neglect of the *dalit* warrior and sepoy in most military histories of India. This important research has often tended to focus, however, on narrating the role of *dalit* soldiers as part of the early trajectory of Ambedkarism, rather than also theorizing their interactive importance in wider colonial knowledge formation. Both the marginalization of *dalit* sepoys in military historiography and the limitation of the significance of Mahar and Mang exclusion from the Bombay Army to its preliminary relevance to Ambedkarite politics have restricted its wider importance. Moreover, these tendencies are symptomatic of a wider trend in recent historiography on India, which in greater or lesser degrees has bracketed off *dalit* society and left its influence and interaction in colonial knowledge formation (such as martial-race ideology) relatively unexplored (see, for example, Inden 1990).

A notable exception to this trend is an article by Stephen Cohen (1969). Cohen argues that in premodern, pre-industrial society, the army was representative of an unequalitarian caste system, and low-caste warriors found a place corresponding to their subordinate social status with little means for social mobility. Under British colonial rule, however, *dalit* sepoys benefited from colonial army service in terms of income, welfare and pension arrangements, and access to government facilities as a means of stimulating social improvement. Given this increase in material resources, Cohen argues that low-caste groups sought "kshatriya-ization" in the British colonial period, whereby they emulated local martial traditions of higher-caste kshatriya (or warrior) groups and adopted pseudo-rational (orientalist) criteria (such as martial-race ideology) on the basis of their military achievements in order to increase their social status.<sup>2</sup> Cohen's argument is very important for emphasizing what many subsequent military histories seem to have marginalized, namely the importance of *dalit* sepoys. Yet such an analysis also seems to suggest that *dalit* soldiers could only hope to emulate the local martial traditions of others and seek integration (by kshatriya-ization) into the brahmanically-idealized *varna*/caste hierarchy of nineteenth-century colonial India (constructed in terms of brahman, kshatriya, vaisya, and shudra *varnas*). This interpretation seems to limit *dalit* sepoys to trying to fit themselves in with orientalist, colonial, or brahmanic Hindu cultural perspectives devised by others, rather than allowing *dalit* sepoys to initiate, interact, and contribute to the formulation of social discourse themselves. To a certain degree, *dalit* culture continues to be seen in parenthesis, rather than being conceptualized as an active and independent participant in wider colonial knowledge formation and society.

Utilizing the exclusion of Mahar and Mang soldiers from the Bombay Army after 1892 and the *dalit* protest that this exclusion stimulated, this article explores the changing martial ideology of Mahar and, to a lesser degree, Mang soldiers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by analyzing their own Marathi writings, literature, and tracts. In the context of historiography on the Indian army, this article first reveals how Mahar and Mang soldiers continued in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to develop a precolonial martial heritage that focused on their association in kshatriya *naukari* (military service) as an open-status or inclusive military ideology, including higher-caste Maratha, lower-caste Maratha-kunbis, and Mahar and Mang warriors in kshatriya service to a king. Secondly, it explains how

<sup>2</sup>Cohen's analysis adapts the theory of sanskritization developed by M. N. Srinivas (1962; 1989).

Mahar and Mang soldiers' cultural concept of open-status kshatriya *naukari* was seen to have come into increasing conflict in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century western India with an emergent closed-status or exclusive high-caste Maratha kshatriya concept of *naukari* and military recruitment. Thirdly, this article analyzes how this social exclusification of kshatriya identity disposed many high-caste Maratha kshatriyas to develop a martial-race ideology with the purpose of further promoting their kshatriya status in opposition to a colonial *varna* structure that emphasized not the kshatriya king but the brahman priest as the highest Indian social authority. Finally, this article examines how such social trends also led Mahar sepoys to reconceptualize their inclusive kshatriya *naukari* ideology in racial terms in the late nineteenth century in order to challenge their military marginalization by growing Maratha exclusivity. On this basis, this article argues that the interrelationship between *dalit* and caste Hindu (Maratha) sepoys and the interaction of their social ideologies are fundamentally important for understanding martial-race theory in the late nineteenth century. Rather than being simply an orientalist invention by British colonial officers for strategic recruitment and hegemonic control, martial-race ideology was in fact a late nineteenth-century racial manifestation of a longer-term Indian trend of social differentiation of kshatriya identity between an exclusive kshatriya *naukari* of higher-caste Marathas, and an inclusive/open-status kshatriya *naukari* based on non-ascriptive kshatriya status, in which *dalit* warriors played crucial roles.

In the wider context of the historiography on colonial knowledge formation, this article also argues that the presence of this kshatriya discourse, with its Maratha and Mahar voices, in late nineteenth-century India acted as a strong contestatory challenge to the brahmanized discourse of *varna* hierarchy, which, Ronald Inden and Bernard Cohn have argued, dominated colonial India at the turn of the twentieth century (Inden 1990; Cohn 1994). There was, however, an inherent ambivalence in this kshatriya discourse. On the one hand, the exclusive social trend of Maratha kshatriya ideology, in as much as it was aimed to contest brahmanicized hierarchy and social dominance, also sought to marginalize and disassociate itself from Mahar and Mang soldiers, leading to the further institutionalization of the latters' untouchability under British colonial rule. On the other hand, *dalit* sepoys simultaneously sought to promote an open-status kshatriya ideology as an egalitarian strategy of resistance to this Maratha elitism and institutionalization of untouchability within the increasingly racialized and brahmanized social structure of late nineteenth-century colonial rule. They thereby attempted to challenge a construction of colonial knowledge and society that confirmed their untouchability. Although British colonial rule had appeared to demilitarize and depoliticize the kshatriya ideology of many precolonial states, this article argues that kshatriya ideology remained a powerful discourse for the promotion of social change by a variety of social groups in nineteenth-century western India.

### *Dalit* Perceptions of Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Kshatriya *Naukari*

In describing Afghan and Mughal rule in north India from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, Kolff (1990) has argued that aspirant rulers, like Sher Khan, King of Delhi 1540–45 with poor connections to aristocratic (Afghan) lineages, sought initially to recruit their armies by using their skills as military entrepreneurs in local military labor markets. This form of recruitment created warbands and

substantial parts of their armies in which ethnic divisions, religious persuasion, or clan loyalties were mitigated by attitudes of heterodox eclecticism, recruitment on merit, and a unitary social identity that was formed by peasant recruits assuming the Afghan or Rajput identity of the professional warband in which they took on *naukari*, or military service. With the consolidation of their states, however, kings like Sher Khan drew closer to later Mughal political organization and away from the political tradition of military recruitment entrepreneurship. Indicative of this change was the replacement of negotiated military labor contracts (such as with Purbiya Rajput brokers of military *naukari* in Malwa) with *jagirdari* (land grant) alliances based on ascriptive, closed-status groups such as the Ujjainya Rajputs of Bhojpur. Although these Ujjainya Rajputs did not originally constitute endogamous castes, but formed open-status groups of clans, lineages, and families connected by connubial ties, a Rajput group identity began to emerge among these families from the late sixteenth century. This identity was initially as horse-troopers or village headmen under the Mughal state, but later became one of a gentrified military and landed class. This gentrification was signalled by increasingly closed ranks, an emphasis on exclusive kshatriya status and kingship, an adopted Mughal focus on genealogy with marriages forged with Mughal families, and exclusion of other Rajput groups who continued to represent the older open-status group of medieval soldiering.

By contrast, Stewart Gordon has shown that in western India the characteristics of military *naukari* in the Deccani sultanate and Maratha periods from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries were slightly different from those described by Kolff in Afghan and Mughal north India between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. Gordon has argued that, while Maratha martial ethos in western India developed out of military service to the two Deccani Muslim rulers of Ahmednagar and Bijapur in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century western India, Maratha identity remained distinct in dress, diet, genealogy, and marriage restrictions from the Muslim Indian Dakhni units or Afagis (Muslim migrants) from central Asia. Most Maratha families were *deshmukhs* or entrepreneurial colonizers of land in a group of villages that they had subsequently distributed to other settlers in return for a share of their harvest. The distribution or ratification of these *deshmukhi* rights by the Deccani sultanates also gave the *deshmukhs* the local authority to collect the states' revenues. In return, the Maratha *deshmukhs* and their subordinates, the Maratha village *patils* (headmen), carried out army and local policing for the Deccani sultanates and the later seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Maratha states. The Deccani sultanates did not, however, possess the resources of the Mughal empire, so that Maratha families did not generally form marriage alliances with the sultanates' royal houses, there was no *mansabdar* service, and land grants (*jagirs*) were small. As a consequence, although an elite Maratha group identity slowly began to consolidate, initially as village headmen at the time of Shivaji's leadership (1630–80) and later as a gentrified and landed class with integrated ranks, genealogy, and kshatriya status, they were not as substantially hierarchized as a closed-status group as the Ujjainya Rajputs, and many remained closer in lifestyle to the agricultural peasant than the court (Gordon 1994, 192–98). This perceived closer association of Maratha families with the lower-caste Maratha-kunbi, and even the Mahar and Mang peasants whom they employed in infantry *naukari*, remained one of the main foci of the martial culture of western India until the mid-nineteenth century.

In 1869 Jotirao Phule (1827–90), a low-caste Mali social reformer in western India sought to emphasize this perceived Maratha military association with lower castes in his Marathi *Ballad of Raja Chatrapati Shivaji Bhosale*, in which he styled the

Maratha king Shivaji as “the child of the great warrior Kshatriyas,” presented in a ballad for “the completely ruined Kshatriyas of Kunbis, Malis, Mahars, and Mangs” in western India (Phule [1869] 1969, 7). Phule saw the concept of open-status kshatriya *naukari* as a means of uniting all the non-brahman castes in support of his Satya Shodhak Samaj reform movement against brahman sociopolitical dominance. Phule perceived Shivaji to have asserted his own kshatriya *raja dharma* and his followers’ kshatriya identity against brahmanic orthodoxy (and Muslim encroachment) by promoting soldiers of all castes according to merit in his armies during the formation of the seventeenth-century Maratha state. Thus Phule described Shivaji at the beginning of his ballad, or *pavada*, as the creator of a kingdom of kshatriyas:

I sing the ballad of Bhosale, the jewel of the Kulavadis [*kunbis*], of Chatrapati Shivaji,  
The patron of the Kunbis, he gave the sacred thread to his caste brothers [making  
them kshatriyas],  
He is the dreaded enemy of the Yavana [Muslims].

([1869] 1969, 6)

Throughout the *pavada*, Phule recounted the courage and ingenuity of Shivaji and his kshatriya warriors:

He showed the Mughals his cleverness, and went at night and unexpectedly looted  
Junnar.  
He sent his men to plunder, along a by-road they went quietly to Ahmednagar.  
They secured fine clothes, jewels, gold coins, there was no dearth of wealth.

([1869] 1969, 17)

Phule saw Mughal conquest of India as a consequence of Indian debility under brahman influence. In his view, the role of king Shivaji and his kshatriya warriors was to re-establish kshatriya *dharma*, just as the rule of the British Queen Victoria was to remove the injustices of the eighteenth-century brahmanic Peshvai in western India ([1869] 1969, 14, 38). Thus he eulogized Shivaji’s just administration of the cultivators who furnish kshatriya *naukari* for his armies:

You [Shivaji] did not forget during the wars to attend to the well-being of the *rayats*  
[cultivators].  
You passed new laws. Both great and small people received redress. You neglected  
no one.

([1869] 1969, 37)

Phule sought to adapt the social fluidity of kshatriya *naukari* tradition whereby peasant recruits might assume the professional soldiers’ kshatriya identity, and he used this assumed kshatriya identity to override other multiple ethnic, religious, or caste identities in order to promote his nineteenth-century message of non-brahman unity and egalitarian social reform. In addressing Shivaji, he thus described the composition of Shivaji’s army:

You were accompanied by *mavali* soldiers [from the east Sayhadri region].  
You made soldiering open to all. You suffered heat and thirst. You did not fear the  
rains.  
You travelled the mountains and valleys. You reduced the might of the Yavana.  
You plundered many lands. You increased the greatness of our *jati*.  
With great wisdom you fought and performed wonderful deeds on this earth.  
Although you gathered riches, you used them wisely.

You gave a share to your soldiers—you had no greed for wealth.

Shrewd and cautious, you forswore idleness.

You never neglected your troopers, either great or small.

King, first among kshatriyas, you are without equal.

([1869] 1969, 37)

This reformist adaptation of Shivaji's *naukari* tradition and its concomitant sense of social fluidity, was not however limited to low-caste writers like Jotirao Phule, although his *pavada* on Shivaji was to be particularly influential in stimulating *dalit* martial pride in the later nineteenth century. Other Marathi biographers of Shivaji in the second half of the nineteenth century also, often indirectly, gave support to low-caste and *dalit* perceptions of their participation in kshatriya *naukari* traditions. By the 1870s and 1880s in western India, Shivaji had become a popular biographical figure in Marathi literature (see, for example, Lele 1873; Bhagvat 1889, 1893; Keluskar [1907] 1998) and in the English writing of M. G. Ranade (1900). Some of these biographies, like those of Bhagvat and Ranade, emphasized the cooperative coexistence of all Maharashtrian castes in earlier times as a definitive characteristic of Maharashtrian cultural greatness. Bhagvat, for example, argued of medieval Jadhav rule and Shivaji's seventeenth-century state that neither brahmans nor non-brahmans paid any attention to the divisions of caste, but were concerned only for the general well-being of the Maharashtrian community (1889, 8). Ranade, too, put forward this sense of "national unity," which he believed transcended caste division in the seventeenth-century Maratha state. He wrote:

It was the upheaval of the whole population, strongly bound together by common affinities of language, race, religion and literature, and seeking further solidarity by a common independent political existence. It was a national movement or upheaval in which all classes cooperated. The strength of the organisation did not depend on a temporary elevation of the higher classes, but it had deeper hold on the vast mass of the rural population. With the Rajputs, the ascendancy was confined to a few particular clans of noble families. With the Sikhs, the ascendancy was limited to the Khalsa army who constituted a small minority of the population of the Punjab. The case was far otherwise with the Marathas, among whom there were no doubt class ascendancies and clannish feelings, but these were kept under by the general political sense of the population generally, who joined the national armies for six months in the year [*naukari*], and returned to their homes and cultivated their family lands and enjoyed their *vatans* [small hereditary land grants] during the remaining period.

(1900, 6–8)

Moderate brahman Hindu reformers like Bhagvat and Ranade differed from Phule's more radical interpretation less in terms of recognition of low-caste participation in the military *naukari* of Maratha state formation under Shivaji, than in the role they also attributed to brahman influence in this process. More orthodox brahman accounts of Shivaji, such as those of Ekanath Annaji Joshi (1877, in O'Hanlon 1986, 179–85) and Bal Gangadhar Tilak (see Cashman 1975; Samarth 1975) tended to marginalize the low-caste role in Maratha state formation altogether in favor of higher-caste Hindu leadership in the face of Mughal oppression.

Nineteenth-century Mahar martial culture was also characterized by a strong sense of Mahar kshatriya *naukari* in the service of the Deccani sultanates and Shivaji's Maratha state. Subhedar Gopal Baba Valangkar (19th Bombay Infantry), the Mahar leader in Dapoli in the late 1880s and 1890s and a colleague of Phule, echoed Phule's terminology in defining the Mahars as "polluted Kshatriyas" in his 1888 Marathi

pamphlet against untouchability (Valangkar 1888, 24; see also Constable 1997; Dhale 1988; Dhaware 1980; Pantavane 1982). Like Valangkar, other pensioned Mahar soldiers in Dapoli, such as Subhedar-Major Gangnak Sanjnak (12th Bombay Infantry) and Subhedar-Major Ramnak Chawnak (20th Bombay Infantry), had petitioned the government about Mahar army recruitment in 1895 and 1901 respectively. They also reflected the widespread low-caste popular belief in the casteless basis of military *naukari* and the substantial Mahar and Mang recruitment in Shivaji's and East India Company armies (Valangkar 1895; *Bombay Education Dept.* 1901, 33 [Petitions], MSA). It was generally held in *dalit* popular culture that most Mahar and Mang soldiers in Maratha armies had been infantry, known as *nak* and *ravit* respectively. The Maratha kshatriya warriors rode on horseback, and for each Maratha horseman, there were two attendant foot soldiers, or *paik*, from the Mahar and Mang castes: one to attend to the animal and one to cut fodder. The Maratha artillery was dragged along by bullocks, and the Mahars and Mangs also attended to this transport and fired the cannon (Robertson 1938, 60). Patrick Cadell noted:

While the bulk of [Shivaji's] men were naturally Marathas, they included not only the allied castes of Dhangars and Gowalas, shepherds and herdsmen, but many who had no claim to kinship. For example Shivaji's famous infantry was composed largely of Bhandaris and Kolis. The Ramoshis... who afterwards formed the infantry of Haidar and Tipu in Mysore, were relied on for the capture of the hill forts, while the outcaste Mahars and Mangs served in his artillery, and in the garrisons of these forts. (Cadell, 1938, 12)

In particular, Mahar, Mang, and low-caste Ramoshi soldiers occupied the position of *metenaik* in Shivaji's times to guard the slopes and accesses to Maratha mountain fortresses. Near the top fortification of every hill fort, there was a cleared flat surface area known as *metta* or *mete* (probably Kannarese), which was guarded by Ramoshi, Mahar, and Mang soldiers, or *naik* (Betham 1908, 141; Thorat 1954, 3; Bhavare 1980, 2). Thus in 1746, Khandanak Rammak Mahar of Karanjiye village, Bhor taluka, Rohida, recorded that his father's uncle, Kalanak Mahar of Karanjiye, and Yesnak Sondaker Mahar were in charge of the *metta* on the slopes of Fort Rohida in Ahmednagar during its period under Muslim control (1665–70). They employed Kamalanak Mahar of Natambi village and another from Vadi and Dhavadi, Utrouli taluka, who also acted as *metenaik* and who were given equal shares in provisions. When Fort Rohida was captured by Shivaji in 1670, the *metenaik* of Kalanak and Sondaker Mahar were confirmed by Shivaji. After the death of Kalanak and Sondaker Mahar, Khandanak Ramnak Mahar's father went to Shivaji at Fort Raigad and renewed the *metenaik*, which he subsequently handed down to his son Khandanak Ramnak Mahar (Shinde 1933, 154).

Mahar kshatriya *naukari* was not, however, seen to have been limited to the infantry, artillery, or external guard duties of *metenaik* in Deccani and Maratha armies. Mahars also rose to the status of fort captains (*killedar*). Pamnaik was captain of Saratgad during Aurangzeb's assault on the fort in 1687. Khandanak Ramnak Mahar's brother became captain of the fort at Vakgiri (Robertson 1938, 291; Bhavare 1980, 2), and Seti Mahar, son of Nagnak Mahar who was *patil* in Nagewadi village, Wai province, captured Vairatgad near Wai from the Moguls for Rajaram (Shivaji's successor), for which he received the fort captaincy (event undated; see Shinde 1933, 153; Bhavare 1980, 2). Another grant deed of fort captain and *inam* land to Yesaji Naik Chibe was recorded during the rule of the Shah of Bidar in copperplate edicts allegedly of the sixteenth century. Yesaji Naik was in charge of building the orange

(color of bricks) bastion at Fort Purandhar, but the work was delayed on account of faults in the foundations. The Shah of Bidar was informed in a dream that the foundations would be secured by burying alive an eldest son and his wife in the foundations. Yesaji Naik Chibe considered sacrificing his eldest son and daughter-in-law, but Bahirnak Sonnak, who was working for Yesaji Naik Chibe, agreed to sacrifice his eldest son, Nathnak, and daughter-in-law, Devaki. They were buried alive in the foundations on the eighth lunar day in the dark half of Ashwin, and the walls of the orange bastion of Fort Purandar were successfully completed. The Shah of Bidar confirmed the post of fort captain on Yesaji Naik Chibe, and Bahirnak Sonnak was gifted 205 *bons* (gold coins) and *inam* lands at Nhavi and Bhongoli villages with an annual income of 705 *bons* (Shinde 1933, 162).

Mahar soldiers were particularly reputed in popular culture for their loyalty in military *naukari* to the Marathas and other rulers. During the rule of the Shah of Bidar, the Shah's granary was looted. Damajipant, who was in charge of protecting the granary, was pressed to make good the shortfall for the army, and a Mahar, Vithya Mahar, at Mangalvedha, who was part of Damajipant's retinue, paid the Shah on Damajipant's behalf. In recompense, the Shah gave Vithya Mahar a regular livelihood (event undated; Shinde 1933 160–61). The eighteenth-century orthodox Hindu Peshvai also relied on the loyalty of Mahar kshatriya *naukari*. In 1730 a letter to Tryambakrao Somanvanshi Mahar from the Peshva requested him to be attentive to Udaji Chavan, whose potential rebellion threatened the Peshva (*Peshva Daftari*, V, II, Letter IV, [28 April 1730], in Joshi 1960, 122–24). In a similar demonstration of loyalty, Raynak Mahar defended Fort Raigad against the Peshva's attack in 1773 and was cast down a precipice when he refused to change allegiance from his defeated leader, Potnis (Kamble 1977; 1978). Among loyal and heroic Mahar warriors of the Deccani Muslim and Maratha periods, two Mahars, Amrutmak and Sidnak Mahar, were however given most prominence in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Mahar popular culture. Muslim rulers, such as Aurangzeb, and the Hindu Peshvas had used Mahars to guard the *zenana* (Agarwal 1934, 69; Longer 1981, 4). According to the folk account of the Mahar warrior Amrutmak, when Amrutmak's master, the Shah of Bidar at Mungi Paithan (sometimes cited as Akbar) needed safe conveyance for his queen, Amrutmak loyally undertook to perform this military *naukari*.<sup>3</sup> Before leaving, however, he presented his master with a small casket. He returned home with the queen to a hero's welcome, until brahman ministers insinuated that Amrutmak had seduced the queen on the way. Thereupon, Amrutmak convinced his master of his loyalty by revealing the contents of the casket. Foreseeing the accusations, Amrutmak had voluntarily castrated himself. In return for such loyalty, the king granted him fifty-two village *vatan* (land grant) rights in perpetuity for the benefit of his Mahar *jati* in every village (*Bombay Revenue Dept.* 1895, 77 [Petitions]; *Bombay General Dept.* 1904, 87 [Petitions], MSA). As the Mahar leader Shivram Janba Kamble argued, although these rights were eventually manipulated to enslave Mahars into village servitude, Mahar *vatandars* had once held very important posts in local militias, as well as in wider military *naukari*, because of their reputation for loyalty (Kamble, 18 December 1903, in Navalkar 1930, 141).

Among Mahar warriors in Maratha times, Sidnak Mahar gained special legendary status. At the time of the killing of Sambhaji by Aurangzeb in February 1688, Sidnak Mahar had raised an independent Mahar platoon between 1683 and 1707 in the service

<sup>3</sup>The Mahar/*dalit* leader D. D. Gholap dates this event in 1129 (*Bombay Legislative Council Debates*, VIII, 2, D. D. Gholap, February–March 1923, 369).

of the Maratha state and was honored for his service by Sambhaji's son, Shahu, with the post of *patil* of Kalambi village, Tasgav taluka, Satara (Shinde 1933, 158). Sidnak Mahar's grandson, also called Sidnak Mahar, fought so valorously on horseback for Madhavrao Peshva at the Battle of Kharda in 1795, that the Peshvai army commander Hiroji Patankar refused to have the Mahar force separated from the main camp when the brahman and Maratha kshatriya *sardars* protested about the Mahars' untouchability. It was strongly felt in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Mahar culture that his reply, "this is not a dinner party, but a party of warriors," confirmed Mahar kshatriya *naukari* heritage and was a criticism that also aptly applied to nineteenth-century British military attitudes, which had allowed Hindu religious and ritual concerns into military affairs (Khairmode 1968, 1:212–13).

The interrelated characteristics of "bravery and chivalry," "jealousy of honour," and "devotion to chiefs" (which were later to become martial-race characteristics) were therefore conceived as the essential professional ethic of Mahar kshatriya *naukari* culture. They provided the social bond within the *naukari* warband that overrode other multiple identities, such as religious affiliation and out-caste status. Acts like Bahirnak Sonnak's sacrifice of his eldest son and daughter-in-law, or the self-emasculation of Amrutnak for the reputation of the Shah of Bidar, were all professions of courage and devotion that bound Mahar warriors to their royal masters and obligated their Muslim/Hindu masters and fellow warriors to recognize and honor the Mahars' kshatriya status as part of their military retinue. Indeed, it is pertinent that one of the Mahar narratives used to explain the severity of untouchability imposed on Mahars during the eighteenth-century Maratha Peshvai, was Mahar transgression of this code of bravery, honor, and devotion at the heart of kshatriya *naukari* tradition. In antithesis of the Amrutnak legend, a Mahar guard, Ganapati Mahar of the Peshva's *zenana* in Shaniwar Palace, Pune, was accused of sexual misconduct with one of the women of the *zenana*, and was put to death by the Peshva for breaking his code of honor. The ghost of the executed guard, however, gave the Peshva no peace in his sleep until he made an effigy of the Mahar in the form of the god Ganapati and set it up at the eastern entrance to the palace, where all had to do obeisance to the Mahar's name. The ghost of the presumably innocent Ganapati Mahar was dispatched in this way, but the Peshva took his anger out on Mahars by prohibiting them from entering Pune at times when their shadows might fall on men of higher rank and by requiring them always to carry signs of their civil degradation in dress or accoutrements (Robertson 1938, 73). Although thus degraded in civil life, there remained a consensus in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Maharashtrian popular culture among many liberal brahmans like Bhagvat and Ranade, moderate non-brahman leaders like B. V. Jadhav, social radicals like Phule, and *dalit* leaders like Valangkar and Kamble, that Mahar soldiers had been as brave and loyal as any brahman or Maratha in kshatriya *naukari*. Moreover it was felt that the social recognition which such martial achievement had bestowed, should be seen as a means of overriding ascriptive ethnic, religious, or caste identities in the present as in the past (Jadhav to Kamble, 12 December 1910, in Navalkar 1930, 54–55). As the first *dalit* member of Bombay Legislative Council (1920–23) and editor of *Muknayak*, D. D. Gholap suggested, how could the British disregard Mahar soldiers when even the orthodox Peshvas were forced to recognize their martial spirit? (1920)

### *Dalit Interpretations of Kshatriya Naukari under British Colonial Rule*

General historiographical characterization of the recruitment and composition of the early nineteenth-century Bombay Army under East India Company rule has been

as a cosmopolitan mixture of companies of different social classes with a high proportion of Konkani Mahar, lower-caste Maratha-kunbi soldiers and substantial numbers of *pardeshi*, or nonlocal recruits, from the Punjab, Oudh, and Rajputana (Cohen 1971, 43–44; Mason 1974, 344; Heathcote 1974, 83; Omissi 1994 3; Peers 1995, 93–94; Rosen 1996, 178). Moreover, it has been emphasized, in words echoing the Peel Commission of 1858–59, that there was pride of company and regiment rather than caste identification in the early Bombay Army and that sepoys worked together regardless of caste, regional, and religious distinctions, with promotion based on military merit rather than social status or seniority.<sup>4</sup> The comments of other British officers and military commentators in the first half of the nineteenth century have been used to confirm this historiographical perception. Thus, for example, John Jacob wrote that “in the Bombay Army the Brahmin . . . stands shoulder to shoulder in the ranks,—nay sleeps in the same tent—with his Purwaree [Mahar] fellow soldier and dreams not of any objection to the arrangement” (1858, 119). Likewise, John Malcolm indicated that the attitude of “the Bombay native soldier . . . is patient, faithful and brave, and attached in a remarkable degree to his European officers and . . . there are no men after they become soldiers more attached to their colours” in preference to civil or caste distinctions (1833, 209). This cosmopolitan representation of the Bombay Army (so often contrasted with the high-caste sepoys of the pre-1857 Bengal Army) disguises the fact, however, that until the 1860s the Bombay Army was perceived in *dalit* popular culture as an adaptation or derivation of earlier open-status, *naukari*-orientated Indian armies. Indeed, Cadell intimates at this open-status *naukari* tradition (which Jacob and Malcolm were also arguably describing) by suggesting that “it is possible that the term Rajput or Rashpout was applied . . . to all Hindus of good fighting castes, and was not confined to men of Kshatriya caste only” (1938, 34). Open-status kshatriya *naukari* that included low-caste soldiers was perceived by *dalit* culture to be not only a cultural phenomenon of pre-British colonial India, but also a martial tradition which was adopted in modified form as the basis of the early Bombay Army between the 1670s and the 1860s.

Both the ex-army Mahar activist in Dapoli, Gopal Baba Valangkar, and the Mahar leader in Pune, Shivram Janba Kamble, were keen to indicate that the preponderance of Mahar sepoys in the East India Company’s army and the Mahars’ devoted service regardless of religious or caste considerations had been among the fundamental factors in successfully establishing British rule in India (Valangkar 1895; Navalkar 1930, 6–7). Just as Shivaji’s early rule was seen to have been built on the military *naukari* of low-caste Ramoshi, Mahar, and Mang infantry (Sen 1958, 17–18, 90), so *dalit* martial culture emphasized that the East India Company had used this same tradition in establishing its rule. Like Shivaji’s armies in western India in the mid-seventeenth century, the early Bombay garrison army of the 1670s had included a large proportion of Chambhars, Mahars/Parwaris, *topasses* (low-caste Indian Christian converts), and a low-caste Bhandari militia. Thus, it was known that when the Dutch admiral Ryckloff Van Goens attempted to land at Bombay in 1673, he had been repelled by a force of three hundred Europeans, four hundred Indian Christians, three hundred Bhandaris, and five hundred armed militia of Indian Christians and lower castes (Cadell 1938, 13). Burnell, an ensign in the Bombay garrison in the 1680s, confirmed that the Indian Christians and low-caste soldiers were principally used as out-guards, much in

<sup>4</sup>See *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Organisation of the Indian Army* (henceforth *Peel Commission*), 1858–59, para. 2871–2 and Appendix 67.

the same way that Shivaji deployed low-caste Ramoshis, Mahars, and Mangs as *metenaik*. Moreover, like Shivaji's naval forces, approximately one hundred Mahars/Parwaris and Indian Christians served as guards on the Bombay garrison's frigates against Malabar pirates, which higher-caste Hindus refused to do for religious reasons (Cadell 1938, 33).

This choice of low-caste soldiers for the seventeenth-century Bombay garrison not only replicated Shivaji's contemporaneous preferences for such garrison troops, but was a choice motivated by British suspicion of the divided loyalties of higher-caste Maratha recruits, given the proximity of the powerful Maratha state in Thane to the north of the Bombay coastal enclave. Moreover, as Valangkar indicated, the enslavement of Mahars and Mangs as untouchables under the Peshvai after Shivaji's death in 1680, not only made them willing to serve in the Bombay Army, but also made them reliable soldiers against the Peshvai (Valangkar 1895). British suspicion of the military loyalty of higher-caste Marathas also encouraged them to begin recruitment of "inland" Muslims and Rajputs from northern India in 1684, although in 1737, when the Maratha Peshvai occupied Portuguese Salsette (across the creek from Bombay), plans were drawn up to replace even these "Gentoos" and Hindu sepoys (whose caste was comparable with Marathas) with low-caste Indian Christians converts. By 1742 the seven companies of the Bombay European Regiment still numbered forty-nine *mestees* (Anglo-Indians) and 1,004 Indian Christians out of 1,591 sepoys. In addition, there were a further 843 sepoys in thirteen companies, many of whom were low-caste guards (Cadell 1938, 29, 48). As Britain became a continental power in western India by the 1760s therefore, the formation of new battalions followed in this tradition of mixed-class recruitment, with substantial numbers of Mahars in addition to Purbiyas or Rajputs from Oudh and Rajputana, and a growing number of Konkani Maratha-kunbis. Other companies, like the Lascar Pioneers (later the Bombay Sappers and Miners) and the Bombay Marine Battalion (21st Infantry) formed in 1777, were also composed (like Shivaji's navy) of Mahars/Parwaris and coastal Muslims (Cadell 1938, 79, 82, 91; Longer 1981, 6, 10; Tugwell 1938, 372).

Not only was the early Bombay Army thus easily perceived by Mahar and Mang soldiers to be a continuance of their earlier open-status *kshatriya naukari* tradition under Shivaji, but it was also seen to perpetuate its professional ethic of bravery and loyalty. Mahar popular tradition referred particularly in this respect to the Marine Battalion, where Haveldar Mandnak Mahar was promoted to *jemandar* for the defense of the East India Company frigate Vigilant against pirates in the Gulf of Kutch in 1797. Likewise, in 1798 Haveldar Subannak Vahnak was decorated for a similar defense of the Viper against pirates off the coast of Muscat. During the Napoleonic wars in 1810, the French captured the British cruiser Aurora with seventeen marines (including twelve Mahars) off the coast of Mauritius, but the Mahar mariners preferred imprisonment, until the island was recaptured a year later, than to change sides. In consequence, their leader, Dhondnak Pundnak Mahar, was decorated and promoted to Lance-Haveldar (Cadell 1938, 147; Thorat 1954, 4-5). The most renowned heroism of the Mahar martial tradition was, however, on land at the Battle of Koregaon between the Second Battalion of the 1st Bombay Infantry and the Peshva Bahajirao II's army on 1 January 1818. A contingent of five hundred Indian infantry, two hundred and fifty men of the Pune Irregular Horse, and twenty-four British gunners of the Madras Artillery with two six-pound guns, defended their position at Koregaon, without supplies of food and water, against 20,000-25,000 cavalry and 5,000-8,000 infantry of the Peshva's army (Cadell, 1938, 154; Longer 1981, 13; Thorat 1954, 5). Of the British force, at least half of whom were Mahars, the battle left 275 dead. As

Table 1. Mahar Soldiers as Percentage of the Bombay Infantry and 21st Bombay Native Infantry, 1875–1900

Year	Percentage of Total Infantry	Percentage of 21st Bombay Infantry	Percentage of Native Officers	Percentage of NCOs	Percentage Drummers, Buglers, etc.	Percentage of Private Soldiers
1875	14.6	73.3	5.4	9.4	38	14.6
1880	12.2	53.1	7.1	9.7	39.2	11.9
1885	9.8	38.5	5.5	9.6	33.2	9.4
1890	8.7	35.3	6.1	8.5	35.7	8.2
1891	8.5	33.5	4.9	8.3	37.2	7.9
1892	8.1	31.9	4.6	8.5	37.4	7.5
1893	7.6	28.6	3.9	7.8	34.6	7.1
1894	7	25.7	3.4	6.9	31.7	6.5
1895	6.6	22.5	2.3	6.2	30.4	6.2
1900 <sup>a</sup>	7.3	19.1	4.4	8.7	37.4	6.6

<sup>a</sup>Figures include Mangs and Ramoshis (*Annual Caste Return for the Native Army in India, 1875–1900*, IOL).

a tribute to their heroism and loyalty, the British erected a monument in 1821, which was engraved with their names, including twenty-two Mahar soldiers who fell in action. The Mahar names on the pillar were testimony for Mahar soldiers that they possessed kshatriya qualities not only of courage, but of loyalty and devotion in military *naukari*, and by the 1920s this monument became an important focus for Remembrance Day meetings for Mahars (Kamble 1920).

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, John Malcolm wrote that the Bombay Army continued to be “composed of all classes, Mahammodans, Hindus, Jews and some few Christians, [and] among the Hindus, those of the lowest tribes of Mahrattas and the Purwaree [Mahar], Surtee and Frost sects are more numerous than Rajputs and higher castes” (1833, 208–09). W. B. P. Tugwell also gives early examples of recruitment before caste returns were consistently kept, in which a pre-1812 return for the 107th Bombay Pioneers recorded 256 Parwaris/Mahars, 260 Purbiya Rajputs, and 387 Marathas in a total force of 1,064. There were also high proportions of Parwaris/Mahars in the 128th Pioneers/28th Bombay Infantry in the early nineteenth century (1938, 375–77). By 1852 Cadell gave the composition of the Bombay infantry as 8,037 (31 percent) Marathas, 6,928 (26.7 percent) Brahmins and Rajputs, 1,920 (7.4 percent) Muslims, 264 (1 percent) Christians, and 8,789 (33.9 percent) other castes, most of whom were Mahar sepoys (1938, 200). Likewise in the 1850s, Richard Burton, who served in the 19th Bombay Native Infantry and in the Sind campaign under Charles Napier in 1843, commended Mahar sepoys, especially the Konkani Mahars, as the epitome of the Bombay Army sepoy (1851, 23, 40). By 1875, in spite of a decline in recruitment, Mahar soldiers were still enlisted in twenty-six of thirty battalions, representing 2,970 (14.6 percent) of a total 20,337 Bombay infantry soldiers and 73.3 percent of the 21st Bombay Infantry (Marine Battalion), 11.7 percent of the Bombay Artillery, and 14.4 percent of the Bombay Sappers and Miners. Table 1 gives a breakdown of Mahar officers, non-commissioned officers, and private soldiers as a percentage of the Bombay Army from 1875 to 1900. It also reveals the gradual effects of limitation on further Mahar recruitment, especially

Table 2. Mang and Ramoshi Soldiers as Percentage of the Bombay Infantry, 1875–1900

Year	Percentage of Total Infantry		Percentage of Native Officers		Percentage of NCOs		Percentage of Drummers, Buglers, etc.		Percentage of Private Soldiers	
	Mang	Ramoshi	Mang	Ramoshi	Mang	Ramoshi	Mang	Ramoshi	Mang	Ramoshi
1875	0.04	0.03	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.04
1880	0.3	0.2	—	—	0.4	—	0.7	0.2	0.3	0.2
1885	0.3	0.2	—	—	0.1	—	—	—	0.3	0.2
1890	0.3	0.1	—	—	0.2	0.1	—	—	0.3	0.2
1895	0.2	0.04	—	—	0.3	0.1	—	—	0.2	0.1
1900 <sup>a</sup>	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

<sup>a</sup>Figures for 1900 are combined with Mahars in Table 1 (*Annual Caste Return for Native Army in India, 1875–1900*, IOL).

in the 21st Bombay Infantry from the mid-1870s. Table 2 gives a breakdown of the small percentages of Mang and Ramoshi soldiers after 1875.

Mahar sepoys, in particular, came from Ratnagiri district, south of Bombay in the coastal Konkan strip, and also from Satara, Pune, and Ahmednagar districts, in the Bombay Deccan. Thus, for example, in 1879 there were 2,180 Mahars (1,030 in service and 1,150 pensioners) on the Bombay Army rolls from Ratnagiri district alone, compared to 3,400 Marathas in service and 4,045 Maratha pensioners. The commissioned and non-commissioned officer corps among Mahars from Ratnagiri was also high in 1879, with four in-service and twelve pensioner *subbedars*; four in-service and ten pensioner *jemadars*; and thirty-two in-service and sixty-seven pensioner *haveldars* (*Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency, Ratnagiri*, X, 1880:105). In the Bombay Army more generally, Shivram Govind Waikar Master's 1894 petition for re-recruitment of Mahars into the Bombay Army, listed 173 Mahar commissioned officers of the rank of *subbedar-major*, *subbedar*, and *jemadar* in service across the Bombay Army at the time of the Indian revolt of 1857 (*Bombay Revenue Dept.* 1895, 77 [Petitions], MSA). Shivram Janba Kamble's 1906 military petition also listed over a hundred pensioned commissioned Mahar officers with the rank of *subbedar* or *jemadar* (*Bombay General Dept.* 1906, 98 [Petitions], MSA). Prior to the 1892 decision to exclude such soldiers from the ranks, there seemed little doubt that Mahar sepoys were not only a sizeable (albeit by the 1870s diminishing) proportion of the Bombay Army, but that they had also secured positions of command as commissioned and non-commissioned officers through martial achievement in open-status *naukari*.

Moreover, *dalit* military culture continued to celebrate a succession of military achievements for *dalit* soldiers during nineteenth-century British rule. These were achievements that seemed to validate further their own perceptions of their kshatriya status and identity in terms of martial service and the professional ethic of loyalty and allegiance. The Mahar non-commissioned officer Ramji Shinde was decorated for repulsing an attack of four hundred soldiers with a division of twenty-five men of the 108th Infantry and 103rd Maratha Light Infantry at Mahi in Kathiawad in 1826. Likewise, in the second Sikh war (1846–47), Mahadev Misar and Jannak Ramnak were decorated for reviving the attack at the Battle of Multan (Bhavare 1980, 9). It was, however, the Mahar military pensioner Subhedar Gopal Baba Valangkar who first sought to marshal the significance of such loyal Mahar military service under

British rule. Playing on British fears of a further revolt after 1857, Valangkar emphasized how the East India Company had established its rule through low-caste and *dalit* sepoys, but subsequently lost control due to acceptance of the religious prejudices of the “*brahman kshatriyas*” of the Bengal Army. In Bombay too, it had been the “*brahman kshatriyas*” who had rebelled in 1857, while “on the contrary the regiments where our people predominated remained honest and loyal” (1895). One notable example was that during the 1857 revolt, a party of eight Mahars of the Marine Battalion who were serving as treasury guards on the Indus River steamer Multan successfully defended the boat from the mutinied 26th Bengal Infantry, killing twenty-six assailants (Shinde 1933, 171; Cadell 1938, 215). From the second Afghan war at Kandahar in 1880, Valangkar also gave illustrations of Mahar military service, presumably from the close experience of his Mahar colleagues. For example, Private Sonnak Tannak Mahar (19th Bombay Infantry) fought gallantly to the last with Major S. J. Waudby at Dubrai to keep open communications to Kandahar. Valangkar also argued that at the battle of Kandahar, high-caste Bombay Army soldiers delayed the fighting on the religious pretext of bathing and cooking, and had to be replaced with more reliable Mahar troops on the frontlines. Indeed, Lord Roberts (Commander-in-Chief, 1885–93) himself had recognized that the last troops to leave their original position and retreat to Kandahar in Ayub Khan’s rout of the Bombay Army at Maiwand in 1880 were the Bombay Sappers and Miners, of whom the Mahars formed a sizeable contingent (Roberts 1897, 2:357; Cadell 1938, 238). As the early twentieth-century Mahar leader Shivram Janba Kamble indicated, Mahar martial *naukari*, which had been established under Deccani Muslim rule and used extensively by Shivaji and even by the Peshvai, had thereby received renewed recognition in the Bombay Army during British rule (Kamble 1920). The perceived basis of this military service for the *dalit* sepoys of the Bombay Army before the 1860s was an association of low- and high-caste soldiers in open-status *kshatriya naukari* with its supersession (rather than permanent eradication) of social distinctions, and promotion based on achievement and loyalty to regiment, officers, and king. It was this supersession of social distinction in military *naukari* that was seen to be an early nineteenth-century precedent from which *dalit* culture could launch a broader offensive for their egalitarian civil rights in the late nineteenth century.

### Changing Concepts of *Kshatriya Naukari* among Nineteenth-Century Maratha Soldiers

In contrast to the pre-1850s period in the Bombay Army, it has been generally observed that British colonial reorganization of the Indian Army after 1857 initiated a strategy of more exclusive military recruitment in the Bombay Army. (Cohen 1971, 44; Saxena 1974, 106–112; Mason 1974, 344; Heathcote 1974, 94; Omissi 1994, 22). After the Indian revolt of 1857, the Peel Commission in 1858–59 made the general recommendation on recruitment that “the Native Army should be composed of different nationalities and castes, mixed promiscuously through each regiment” as the best safeguard against revolt. This policy seemed to reflect the pre-1850 Bombay Army system of “general mixture” of recruits, which arguably had limited mutiny in its ranks in 1857 (Peel Commission, 1858–59, 14). In terms of its implementation, however, the Peel recommendation gradually came to be interpreted in the 1860s and 1870s as reorganisation on the basis of regiments containing a variety of squadrons

or companies that were each homogeneously constituted of a different class or caste (Mason 1974, 320; Omissi 1994, 9; see also Peel Commission, 1858–59, Appendix 67). Such organizational development did much in the 1860s and 1870s to begin the consolidation of certain martial recruits into concentrated military corps; for example Dogras, Pathans, Sikhs and Gurkhas in north India who had not mutinied in 1857 (Cadell 1938, 249). Nonetheless in the Bombay Army in the 1870s, many British officers still expressed approval of the “general mixture” system within companies, in spite of favouring certain recruits, and many emphasized their complete disregard for caste distinctions.<sup>5</sup> In 1879, however, the Eden Commission advised converting most regiments in the Bengal Army to class company regiments. By 1883 “general mixture” of class, caste, or regional soldiers in one company had been abolished in the Bengal Army, and although the Eden Commission allowed the continuance of mixed regiments in the Bombay and Madras Armies, their phasing out by 1895 became an increasingly accepted aim.<sup>6</sup> The Eden Commission also emphasized localization of recruitment of the Bombay Army to Bombay Presidency and areas of Rajputana, Central India, and Sind. This practice limited a recruitment base that prior to the 1860s had allowed the Bombay Army to recruit more substantially from north India and now obliged the Bombay Army to rely increasingly on recruitment of local Marathas. Moreover, from the mid-1880s, the diversity of class companies within battalions was also curtailed and homogenized in the interests of greater military integration. From each infantry battalion having eight companies with an average of four different classes of recruits in 1863, by 1885 a three-battalion system was introduced (with active, reserve, and draft battalions) to link battalions for external war. This system further circumscribed the range of recruits by interlinking active, reserve, and draft class companies (see Omissi 1994, 91). Localized recruitment, increasing class structuring, and linking of companies and battalions in the 1880s thus helped to consolidate Maratha martial claims to pre-eminence within the Bombay Army by increasing their numbers and concentrating them together in the same corps.

The Marathas’ martial status was, however, somewhat ambiguous. While localization of recruitment and the increasing delimitation of recruits to certain classes favored their concentration into consolidated fighting units within the Bombay Army, Maratha military reputation was undermined by a growing emphasis on the inferior abilities of western India’s martial recruits. This evolving military dogma on the inferior martial qualities of the Bombay (and Madras) Army was epitomized by the opinions of Lord Frederick Roberts. Roberts’s preference for forces from north-west India was formulated both through contact in 1852 with his father, who had served in the first Afghan war (1839–41), and from his own personal experiences of Punjabi Sikh, Pathan, and Gurkha soldiers during the 1857 Indian revolt and second Afghan war, 1878–80 (Roberts 1897, 1:19–20). Roberts’s appreciation was roused for the Gurkhas, Sikhs, Punjabi Muslims, Dogras, and Pathans who remained loyal in 1857 and led the attacks on Delhi and Sikanderbagh to re-establish British military authority (*ibid.*, 1:113–14, 253, 325, 402). Likewise, in Roberts’s own experience at the Umbeyla Pass in Afghanistan in 1863, it was the Punjabi Sikhs, Gurkhas, and Pathans who had proved most valorous. In his command of the Kuram Field Force

<sup>5</sup>See “Proportion of Castes and Races Proposed by Commanding Officers to be Maintained in the Native (Bombay) Infantry Regiments,” 1875, *Napier Collection* 5 (4), 38–39, IOL.

<sup>6</sup>See *Report of the Special Commission to Enquire into the Organisation and Expenditure of the Army in India* (henceforth *Eden Commission*), 1879, 77–80, para. 237–40, IOL.

against the Peiwar Kotal Pass fortress in 1878, it was again the Sikhs and Gurkhas whom Roberts found most courageous (*ibid.*, 2:121–48). By contrast, Roberts saw the Bombay Army as a discredited force after its rout at Maiwand, in Afghanistan, in 1880 and the necessity of his own relief of their retreating forces at Kandahar with Sikh and Gurkha sepoys (*ibid.*, 2:331–57; Cadell 1938, 221). Roberts wrote disparagingly:

I confess to being very greatly surprised, not to use a stronger expression, at the demoralised condition of the greater part of the garrison [at Kandahar].... There were some notable exceptions (one and all bore testimony to the unfailing good behaviour and creditable bearing of the Royal Artillery and the Bombay Sappers and Miners, not only during the investment but in the very trying time of the retreat from Maiwand), but the general bearing of the troops reminded me of the people at Agra in 1857.... The same excuses could not however be made for them [the troops at Kandahar] who were all soldiers by profession.

(1897, 2:357)

From a popularised Darwinian perspective that looked to history and environment (frontier military action and cold climate) to explain the natural selection of martial recruits (Darwin 1859; 1871), Roberts was convinced that the Bombay Army's lack of military action since the early nineteenth century had rendered its soldiers unwarlike (Roberts 1897, 2: 383). By 1889 he had categorized what he and many others believed to be the foremost martial races:

I have no hesitation myself in stating that except Goorkhas, Dogras, Sikhs, the pick of Punjabi Muhammadans, Hindustanis of the Jats and Ranghur castes (such as enlisted in the cavalry) and certain classes of Pathans, there are not native soldiers in our service whom we could venture with safety to place in the field against the Russian.

("On the Necessity of Improving the Fighting Qualities of the Army"  
[8 February 1890], in Roberts 1893, 6[2]:544)

Roberts felt it was essential "to substitute men of these more warlike and hardy races for the Hindustani sepoys of Bengal, the Tamils and Telegus of Madras and the so-called Mahrattas of Bombay" (1897, 2:441).

Roberts's views, however, did not go unopposed by the Bombay Army, which also had its advocates. Robert Napier had much favored the operational structure and fighting ability of the Bombay Army after its participation in the Sind Campaign (1843), the siege of Multan in the Punjab (1848), the Persian war (1856–57), and the Abyssinian war (1867) (Cadell 1938, 221). Brigadier-General John Jacob had also argued that military problems in India (such as with the Indian revolt in 1857) often lay more with the low leadership quality of the European officer corps and their pandering to the caste prejudices of the Indian soldiers than with the martial heritage and provenance of their subordinate soldiers (Jacob 1857; 1858). Moreover, Roberts's contemporary, John Henry Sylvester, also pointed out that it was not only the Marathas who were martial in the Bombay Army, but it was a widely held view (even in Roberts's own experience at Maiwand in 1880) that the physical endurance of the Bombay Sappers and Miners (a section of whom were *dalit* soldiers) was superior to that of the Bengal Army (Mason 1974, 346; Heathcote 1974, 88). By the time recruitment handbooks on the Marathas, such as those of P. D. Bonarjee ([1899] 1975, 212–17) and Major R. M. Betham (1908), began to emerge in the late 1890s and 1900s, further precedent however was found to validate Roberts's view of how

history and environment had confirmed the second-class martial nature of Marathas. Bonarjee, for example, revived the prejudicial emphasis on Maratha defects of Grant Duff's *History of the Mahrattas* (1818). He wrote:

It is a mistake to suppose that they were ever by instinct a military race like the Sikhs and Gurkhas... The very fact of their having played so conspicuous and not always ignoble a part in the history of India marks them out as a race with some of the qualities of the genuine soldier... despite the enervating and softening influences which a long spell of peace appears to have on the Indian. The Mahrattas in days gone by had courage, but it was the courage of the freebooters rather than the genuinely soldierly instinct. The highest instincts of the soldier was never theirs... The Mahratta... lacks the elegant proportions of the Jat Sikh, the sturdy well-knit figure of the Gurkha, the grand muscular build of the Pathan. He is cast altogether in a less heroic mould.

(Bonarjee [1899] 1975, 215–17)

Emphasis on exclusive recruitment in the Bombay Army meant that Marathas came to be consolidated in exclusive corps, but they came to be increasingly perceived as of questionable background and hence only second-rate recruits.

This process of consolidation of certain “martial races” as a result of exclusive recruitment has been explained largely in terms of colonial military strategy. Stephen Cohen reflects Roberts's own autobiographical portrayal of his actions, namely as a professional strategy for consolidation of the Indian army by focusing principally on soldiers from the North-West Frontier to meet the external threat of Russian attack in the 1880s (Cohen 1971, 41; see also Yapp 1987). This consolidation of certain “martial races” gave precedence to a fighting army based on a limited number of interrelated class-companies/battalions to counter external attack, rather than to an army based solely on the counterbalances of a wider variety of different class companies and more suited to internal military duties (Roberts 1897, 1:x). David Omissi sees this consolidation of exclusive recruitment not only as the result of a growing Russian threat to north-west India, but also in Roberts's particular preference for his northern Bengal Army soldiers and his wish to extend Bengali Army control over other presidency armies leading to a unified Indian command in 1895. Moreover, Omissi indicates that there was also a continuance in a more circumscribed form of an instinctive “divide and rule” mechanism for internal imperial defense, which co-opted and counterbalanced a more limited number of military collaborators on whom the colonial garrison state felt it could rely (1991, 8, 13). As Cynthia Enloe has also argued, the exclusive martial-race recruitment ethic of the colonial military establishment, which emphasized martial occupation as an integral part of some groups' sense of their own ethnicity, was a strategy aimed to focus military service in certain ethnic groups who would loyally support the colonial state (1980, 24–25).

Kaushik Roy has suggested, however, that the degree of hegemonic colonial control that such strategic interpretations of exclusive recruitment implicitly seem to assume, obscures the strong opposition by many British army officers to exclusive martial-race recruitment. He argues that there were two opposing strategies of recruitment. One strategy had its conceptual roots in the exclusive recruitment ethic of the pre-1857 Bengal Army and was developed by Roberts, Colonel Shakespeare (2nd Gurkha Rifles), Lieutenant-General Goodenough, Lieutenant-Colonel Dalton (Royal Artillery), and Major-General MacMunn. They proposed that soldiering and martial spirit were exclusively linked to social, environmental, and/or racial bases. An alternative strategy was proposed by the Punjab School, consisting of John Lawrence

(Commissioner of the Punjab), Brigadier-General Neville Chamberlain, and Lieutenant-Colonel Herbert Edwardes (Commander and officer of the Punjab Frontier Force), and the Sind School, comprising Bartle Frere (Commissioner of Sind) and Major-General Hugh Rose (Commander of Field Forces south of the Narmada). According to Roy, the alternative strategy of these two schools drew its conceptual roots from an inclusive pre-1857 Madras Army recruitment ethic that purported that martial ability was not innate, but the result of training. Their aim was to build an army based not on the exclusive few, but on the inclusive counterpoising of various military classes (1997, 339–43). Roy conceptualizes these exclusive and inclusive recruitment strategies as competing for prevalence across the nineteenth century. It was the inclusive recruitment strategy derived from the pre-1857 Madras Army that predominated in the 1860s and 1870s, but in the 1880s and 1890s the exclusive recruitment strategy of the pre-1857 Bengal Army was revived, although redirected principally at recruitment of north-west Indian martial races (*ibid.*, 343–50).

These divergent attitudes toward recruitment, however, were much more than alternative or competing military “strategies” invented by the British military establishment. In fact, the inclusive and exclusive strategies of military recruitment promoted by British officers were merely colonial permutations of two indigenous Indian martial trends stretching back to the seventeenth century: namely, the open-status/inclusive form of *kshatriya naukari* and an emergent, more exclusive trend of Maratha *kshatriya naukari*. The early Bombay Army had originally favored mixed recruitment or inclusive *kshatriya naukari*, especially of Mahar/Parwari and Maratha-kunbi sepoys from the Bombay coastal strip or Konkan. Yet as Cadell indicates, following the Maratha General Malhar Rao Holkar’s capture of Pune and the Maratha Peshva Bajirao’s alliance with the East India Company by the treaty of Bassein in 1802, inland Deccani Maratha soldiers also gradually began to contribute to the Bombay Army’s infantry in greater proportions (Cadell 1938, 13). Even after the defeat of the Peshvai by 1818, however, many higher-status Marathas still remained outside the Bombay Army, not only from residual allegiance to the defeated Peshvai, but also from disdain of infantry *naukari*. As Stewart Gordon has indicated, service as infantry soldiers (whose numbers substantially increased with the influx of western musketeers after the mid-eighteenth century) had initially seemed for elite Maratha families “to sever the intimate relationship of horse-based service, honour, legitimacy and reward which bound together a ruler and service military families” (1998, 242). Higher-status Maratha abstention encouraged recruitment of Mahar/Parwari, Maratha-kunbi, and *pardeshi* Hindustani soldiers (Saxena 1974, 106–08). Nonetheless, Cadell suggests that by the 1840s and 1850s higher-status Marathas again came to form an increasing element of the Bombay Army when cavalry regiments like Jacob’s Horse (created in 1846) were recruited from Deccani Marathas and Muslims (Cadell 1938, 163, 191). As this higher-status/caste Maratha recruitment increased, expressions of the longer-term eighteenth-century trend toward Maratha social differentiation and exclusification of a Maratha gentry also gradually emerged in the Bombay Army.

This trend toward exclusive higher-caste Maratha-kshatriya identity in the Bombay Army was still held in check to some extent in the 1860s and 1870s, less as a result of government strategy than as a result of the spread of the low-caste Mali leader Jotirao Phule’s Satya Shodhak Samaj movement and its attempts to form a united non-brahman constituency for social reform.<sup>7</sup> In the 1880s, while rising

<sup>7</sup>This unified non-brahman constituency sought to include all non-brahman castes: higher-caste Maratha families, lower-caste Maratha-kunbis, allied Maratha artisan castes, and the so-called untouchable (*dalit*) castes of Mahars and Mangs (see O’Hanlon, 1986).

Maratha recruitment and Maratha concentration into class companies was facilitated by the Russian threat, it was more importantly the fragmentation of the unity of the Satya Shodhak Samaj that above all stimulated the further consolidation of the longer eighteenth-century trend toward an exclusive and delimited Maratha kshatriya identity. This growing social differentiation in the 1880s was particularly evident in civil life, for example in debate over education. While the editor of the Marathi newspaper *Din Bandhu*, N. M. Lokhande, in alliance with the Satya Shodhak Samaj, continued to resist the restriction of the title kshatriya to high-caste Maratha families, other organizations, like the Deccan Maratha Education Association, which was founded in 1883 by B. Mhaske, had taken steps to promote the "higher" education of Marathas, Maratha-kunbis, and Malis. Mhaske thereby effectively ignored the needs of most lower-caste Maratha-kunbis and Malis (not to mention Mahars and Mangs), who, unlike Marathas, needed basic literacy, not higher education. In 1884 D. N. Shelake likewise organized a fund for the spread of education among Marathas. This funding was directed at Marathas and included Maratha-kunbis but excluded Malis and other lower castes. Lokhande countered these attempts to limit Maratha identity by establishing in 1887 the Maratha Aikyaechchu Society (Society for Maratha Unity), which distributed scholarships to all non-brahman castes. Similarly, in 1882 the Society of the Maratha Caste for the Promotion of Kshatriya Dharma, led by T. H. P. Salunkhe, was founded in Bombay to promote an inclusive Maratha kshatriya identity for the purpose of educational reform (O'Hanlon 1986, 288–300). In the military, higher-caste Maratha soldiers reflected these growing social divisions by demonstrating increasing intolerance of *dalit* or even lower-caste Maratha-kunbi soldiers in the Bombay Army, whom they had come to regard as marginal or unrelated to their exclusive kshatriya *naukari* identity. There were protests by Maratha officers who considered Mahars and Mangs, or low-caste Bhandaris, Kolis, and native Christians, to be unsuitable for inclusion in their ranks. There was even insistence on excluding from service Dhangar and Mali soldiers, who were regarded as at best Maratha-kunbis and hence not of kshatriya status (Cadell 1938, 249; Robertson 1938, 65; *Advocate of India*, 7 July 1904, in *Bombay General Dept.*, 87, 1904, MSA). In the 1880s the contest over an exclusive or inclusive kshatriya identity had become an issue of great importance in both military and civil affairs in western India. Concomitantly, the burgeoning of exclusive martial-race ideology was less a hegemonic colonial strategy invented by the British colonial establishment for British social and military control over India, than colonial "accommodation" for strategic purposes of higher-caste Maratha claims to social exclusivity as kshatriyas.

By the early 1890s, a clear social trend had emerged delimiting kshatriya identity to Marathas and even to the Maratha "shahannava kuli" (ninety-six lineages), who sought to uphold their elitist perception of kshatriya heritage by distancing themselves from the Maratha-kunbi *jatis*. In particular in the late 1890s and early 1900s, the demands of the Maharaja of Kolhapur, Shahu Chatrapati (1874–1922) for Vedic religious rites (befitting a kshatriya) rather than Puranic rights (of a shudra) (see Copland 1973) spurred many prominent Maratha families to follow suit in asserting a more exclusive kshatriya heritage. A revival of debate on the kshatriya status of Shivaji (Shahu Chatrapati's ancestor) ensued. The Maratha biographer of Shivaji, K. S. Keluskar ([1907] 1998), sought, for example, to counter brahman "myth" that Parashuram had annihilated all kshatriyas in south and western India by demonstrating the true kshatriya status of Shivaji (and by association Shahu Chatrapati). Some Maratha writers, such as V. Birje (1912), K. B. Deshmukh (1922), and G. B. Dalvi (1924), reflected Maratha popular culture's use of racialized

distinctions between Aryan invaders of India and Non-Aryan/Dravidian indigenous inhabitants of India as a means of explaining and promoting Maratha kshatriya claims. They emphasized that high-caste Maratha lineages were not Non-Aryan shudras but the descendants of Aryan kshatriyas, whose status as military protectors and rulers had been usurped by Aryan brahmans. In challenging Aryan brahman claims to social superiority, Maratha kshatriya ideology stressed the original equality of Aryans (brahmans and kshatriyas) arising from the absence of caste determination by birth in Vedic times. At the same time, they sought to distance themselves from the conquered Non-Aryan shudras (among whom they numbered the Maratha-kunbis). Some Maratha writers, most notably Shahu Chatrapati's (Maratha-kunbi) minister and lawyer Bhaskarrao Jadhav (1867–1950), reflected ideological attempts (commonly associated with Shahu Chatrapati) to find common ground between the increasingly divergent beliefs of the earlier Satya Shodhak Samaj's inclusive view of kshatriya identity and the growing exclusivity of elite Maratha kshatriya lineages. Jadhav emphasized that, although Marathas were descendants of Aryan invaders who had become mixed with indigenous Dravidian races, they remained fundamentally Aryan kshatriyas. In addition, he sought to remove status distinctions among Marathas and include Maratha-kunbis within the kshatriya ideology (Jadhav 1932; see also Omvedt, 1976, 132–33). From the 1890s, Maratha kshatriyas (and even Maratha-kunbis) had come to perceive themselves as possessing a social and military status based on Aryan descendancy that was equal and even superior to Aryan brahmans. In their view, this elevated status rendered Marathas alone worthy of association in kshatriya *naukari* with India's other Aryan kshatriya lineages, and bifurcated older forms of open-status kshatriya *naukari* and military association with lower castes.

British military officers sought to take advantage of this indigenous Aryan kshatriya development for their own military ends. Like many Maratha writers, the majority of Indian army recruitment handbooks of the late 1890s and 1900s sought to attribute martial ability almost wholly to hereditary race and largely to races of alleged Aryan kshatriya extraction: a result of a growing popular emphasis on heredity deriving from the Darwinian revisionism of Francis Galton (1869) and Karl Pearson (1910) (see Betham 1908; Bingley 1898; 1899; n.d.; Bingley and Nicholas 1897; Bonarjee [1899] 1975; Bourne 1914; Ridgway 1910; Vansittart 1906; Wikeley 1915). Among these recruitment handbooks, those of P. D. Bonarjee ([1899] 1975, 212–17) and Major R. M. Betham (1908) on the Marathas clearly reflected and promoted this racial consolidation of the indigenous concept of elite Maratha kshatriya *naukari* and its bifurcation of prior forms of inclusive/open-status kshatriya identity. Unlike Phule's earlier attempts to promote the united *naukari* identity of Marathas with "the ruined Kshatriyas of Kunbis, Malis, Mahars and Mangs," Bonarjee and Betham reflected the distinct socioethnic divisions that high-caste Marathas (and British officers) had come to see divided this social identity. Bonarjee and Betham categorized the Maharashtrian (or Maratha) brahmans as ethnically separate Aryan migrants to western India/Maharashtra who converted the indigenous Dravidian Mahar inhabitants to Hinduism. According to Bonarjee and Betham, Marathas were a race anterior to the Aryans and/or Aryan Rajput soldiers who migrated into western India in prehistory and were "infused with . . . a considerable strain of Mahar, i.e. Non-Aryan, blood" (Bonarjee [1899] 1975, 214–15; Betham 1908, 10). Bonarjee conceptualized the Maratha-kunbis as "the Mahar peasantry of Maharashtra . . . who furnished most of the Mahratta troops in their career of conquest" (ibid., 215). Clearly, Bonarjee conceived of only a very limited degree of distinction between the Mahar soldier (Dravidian in origin and regarded as untouchable) and the lower-caste Maratha-

kunbi soldier (produced by miscegenation between indigenous Dravidian Mahars and Aryan migrants). Bonarjee, however, interpolated an important distinction of direct Aryan Rajput descendants for Marathas, which Maratha-kunbis lacked (a viewpoint similar to Maratha writers Birje, Deshmukh, and Dalvi). Betham drew recruitment distinctions with an even finer pen. The Deccani Maratha-kunbis were to be enlisted, but the Konkani Maratha-kunbis were not, even though the latter, along with Mahars, had been the backbone of the early Bombay Army. While among related Maratha castes, Lohars (blacksmiths) and Sutars (carpenters) were useful, and certain Dhangars (shepherds) were acceptable, Mahar and Mangs were rejected because they were considered non-Marathas, non-kshatriyas, and untouchables (Betham 1908, 48–49). Bonarjee's and Betham's analyses reflected the new Aryan kshatriya category of colonial martial *naukari*, which reconstituted in ethnic terms the older inclusive category of open-status kshatriya identity in order to portray only Aryan Marathas among Hindus in western India as belonging to a kshatriya heritage.

As many of the recruitment handbooks and in particular the writings of Lieutenant-General George MacMunn (1869–1952) reveal, this elite racial category of India's Aryan kshatriyas offered the possibility of an ideologically-based military alliance for British colonial rule. While Roberts had seen the 1857 revolt as in large part an effect of brahmanical influence on the Indian army and its suppression as a result of an alliance of true kshatriya warriors (1897 1:415–17), MacMunn went further in envisaging India's kshatriyas as descendants of

the Aryan races from their cradle somewhere on the steppes of Asia . . . a white race akin to our British selves, which became the mother of the Hindu race of today . . . . The various races of India to-day, in various guises which merit the term and distinction of "martial" . . . in some way or other . . . are the descendants of the warriors [Rajputs] who carried forward the Aryan exodus and influx, and that mingled with them, are another race somewhat cognate, who came last, whom we know as Jat.

(1933, 6–8)

MacMunn thereby posited an alliance of Aryan warriors from northern Europe and northern India as the epitome of martial perfection.<sup>8</sup> He wrote:

The Jat Sikhs mighty and curled of beard, kin perhaps to the men of Kent, the Jutes from Jutland, with them Moslem and Hindu Rajputs the fierce hillmen from the frontiers, the Tartar from Nepal that we know as the Gurkha, recking little else than that the Badshah or Padishah, the great White King, had summoned them and that his white officers would lead them and his white troops fight by their side.

(ibid., 4)

Inherent in the Indian Aryan martial races were detected the same, if less perfected, qualities of the Anglo-Saxon martial race, which in the early decades of the nineteenth century Sharon Turner, Walter Scott, and Augustin Thierry had established in British popular perception as a race of warriors who exerted a natural right to liberty of action, constrained only by sentiments of honor, equity, and loyalty to their community (Turner 1802–5, 1807 1820; Scott 1820; Thierry 1825). Char-

<sup>8</sup>Even the Nepalese Gurkhas were seen less as an anomaly than a variant associated with this Aryan identity as a result of an infusion of Aryan blood, their climatic-conditioning by cool frontier regions, the influence of Hinduism, and their rejection of brahmanism (MacMunn 1911, 162–63; 1933, 17–18; see also Caplan 1991; Des Chene 1993).

acter development under such an Anglo-Saxon moral order had in large part, it was believed, rendered the Anglo-Saxon the most excellent product of a long lineage of superior warriors which stretched back to Aryan origins (Horsman 1976). In the 1840s and 1850s, in the wake of imperial expansion, writers like Thomas Carlyle were beginning to popularize the belief that this Anglo-Saxon community had been designated the task of spreading its moral order to the “lesser” nations of the world (Carlyle 1840, 70). By the 1860s, the Anglo-Saxons had become idealized by such authors as Robert Knox (1798–1862) and James Hunt (1833–69) as a race constituted of an active, self-sufficient community of natural democrats who believed in hard work, order, and fair play, but who had a clear consciousness of martial and racial superiority in relation to other races (Knox 1862; Hunt 1863). “Brave and chivalrous,” “jealous of their honour,” “free and a member of the ruling race,” with “devotion to their chiefs”: these were as much the stereotypical characteristics used to describe Anglo-Saxon soldiers as Indian Aryan kshatriya warriors. While the British military establishment in India might not have exactly agreed with Max Müller’s conjecture that the same blood ran in the veins of English Anglo-Saxon soldiers as in the veins of Indian Aryan sepoys, they were prepared to accept that certain Indian martial races were their Aryan fellows-in-arms (Müller, 1871, 1: 245–47, 271–89, 327). With this ideological/racial alignment in mind, the British military establishment sought to accommodate and consolidate changes in Aryan kshatriya group identities (or as the colonial establishment termed them, “martial races”) in order to provide allies for the promotion of British strategic security in India.

In essence, however, the elite Aryan kshatriya identity, which the British military co-opted to its own purpose, was the outcome of an indigenous Indian social trend from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By this trend, Maratha kshatriyas sought to revise inclusive kshatriya *naukari* of old to their purpose of challenging their brahmanically prescribed social inferiority, removing their lower-caste association, and (like the Ujjainya Rajputs described by Kolff) gentrifying themselves as village *patils* and *deshmukhs* at the expense of less well-positioned Maratha-kunbi, Mahar, and Mang soldiers who had previously been brothers-in-arms. The influx of high-caste Marathas and, particularly Maratha cavalry, into the Bombay Army after the 1850s had initiated this trend of social differentiation in the Bombay Army by bifurcating the older inclusive or open-status ethic of kshatriya *naukari* that had previously allowed lower castes to be treated on comparable terms with higher-caste *pardeshi* or Maratha infantry. By the 1880s and 1890s, Maratha (and Rajput) elites in the Bombay Army were in a position to internalize racial ideas into their kshatriya discourse in order to consolidate and promote further their longer-term social exclusification in opposition to brahmanic definitions of their lower social status. By assuming Aryan kshatriya identity through Aryan kshatriya *naukari* in an Aryan British army, Maratha soldiers sought to challenge brahmanic social prescription and hierarchy, and assert their social equality or even superiority to brahmans. In the process, Maratha kshatriyas determined the development of a new definition of Indian martial *naukari* based on a kshatriya alliance of British and Indian Aryan races.

### *Dalit Soldiers’ Challenge to Changing Concepts of Kshatriya Naukari*

This consolidation of an Aryan Maratha kshatriya elite in the 1880s and 1890s and the bifurcation of older open-status kshatriya *naukari* identity was important for

*dalit* soldiers because it had a decisive effect on their recruitment to military service. The reduction of Mahar and other *dalit* soldiers from the Bombay Army occurred gradually over the 1880s, but the decisive end to their further recruitment came from the Government of India in October 1891. These Government of India proposals involved the abolition of the remainder of the mixed system in the Bombay Army and the establishment of a system whereby each company in a battalion would be composed of a different martial class, and eventually all the companies in a battalion or regiment would be recruited solely from one martial class within localized recruitment areas. Of thirty Bombay Army infantry battalions, seven were Baluchi or Frontier battalions whose recruitment was refocused specifically on Sind, Baluchistan, and the North-West Frontier Provinces in 1891–92 (*Bombay Military Proceedings*, February 1891, 1892, IOL). The remainder were to be reconstituted around Marathas, Deccani Muslims, Rajputs, and Sikhs, and the further enlistment of Mahar and Mang soldiers was to be prohibited (*Bombay Military Dept.*, 1891, 13, MSA). Such proposals implied a substantial alteration in the composition of the Bombay Army, given the Bombay Army's previously professed disregard for caste-based organization of rank-and-file recruitment. The Mahabuleshwar Committee met in May 1892 to consider the Government of India's proposals for the reorganization of the Bombay Army and accepted class organization and the elimination of low-caste recruitment (*India Military Proceedings*, December 1893, (Mahabuleshwar) Report, 5–6, 24, para. 13, 16, 37, IOL).<sup>9</sup> The committee found twenty-nine British officers, out of thirty infantry regiment and local district officers, to be in favor of class regiments and/or class companies. The one exception was from the Bombay Sappers and Miners, where it was felt that companies had to be mixed in order to maintain both fighting and engineering efficiency. Some officers, however, also indicated the drawbacks of class companies and regiments, while agreeing in principle to class organization. Only six officers expressed approval of the retention of Mahar/Parwari soldiers (Sappers and Miners, 2nd Grenadiers, 9th, 12th, and 19th Infantry and Mhow District Force), while the Commanding Officer of the 21st Infantry indicated that it contained four companies of Ramoshis. In many cases, their judgment was based on relatively recent combat experience in the field with the Bombay Infantry in the second Afghan war (1878–80) and in Afghanistan in the 1880s. Some even suggested the value of a separate Mahar regiment. The committee chairman, Gatacre, presented a proposal to convert the Mahar soldiers into a non-combatant guard corps for the Bombay Army. Mang soldiers, however, found general disapproval, although seven officers agreed to some Mang and Mahar retention as bandsmen.<sup>10</sup> Retention of Mahar soldiers was clearly not without support among European officers in the Bombay Army in the early 1890s.

It was, however, proposed in justification of the exclusion of the Mahar sepoy that where he failed "was not so much as a private soldier, for he is plucky and hard enough, as in the capacity of a native officer or non-commissioned officer where his want of caste is dead against his exercising proper authority" (*ibid.*, 5). This adverse judgment on Mahar soldiers' ability to command as officers was clearly contradicted,

<sup>9</sup>The Mahabuleshwar Committee (1892) was composed of Commander of Nagpur District Brigadier-General Gatacre, Commander of Poona Horse Colonel Currie, and Commander of 1st Grenadiers Lieutenant-Colonel Black.

<sup>10</sup>See *India Military Proceedings, Proceedings of Mahabuleshwar Committee*, 1892, Appendix, "Précis of Opinions of Commanding Officers of Bombay Cavalry and Infantry Regiments," pp. 1–25; and (Mahabuleshwar) Report, p. 39.

not only by the substantial number of commissioned and non-commissioned Mahar officers (see Table 1), but by many in the Bombay government who knew of the long-standing tradition of Mahar military service and regretted the apparent injustice imposed by the Government of India on Mahar soldiers. John Muir-Mackenzie, member of the Bombay Executive Council, went as far as to state that Mahars had always exerted authority as officers unhindered by their alleged untouchable status (Navalkar 1930, 145). The Bombay government claimed that Mahar recruitment up to the grade of head constable in the police would also have been practicable if the Government of India had not flatly refused to accept Mahars (*Bombay Judicial Dept.* 1906, 98, MSA). Moreover, as the *dalit* leader Shivram Janba Kamble indicated, the question of whether Mahar officers could command respect would have been irrelevant if the Government of India had not refused to consider assembling a separate Mahar regiment. The Mazhbis Sikhs, who were considered untouchables by the Sikh regiments in the Bengal Army, were seen as a precedent for such a policy (Navalkar 1930, 143, 162). From 1875 to 1890, statistics on the composition of the Bombay Army reveal a steady reduction in Mahar recruitment. In 1875 Mahars represented 14.6 percent of the Bombay Infantry, in 1880 it was 12.2 percent, in 1885 it was reduced to 9.8 percent, and in 1890 it reached 8.7 percent (*Annual Caste Return for the Native Army in India*, 1875–1900, IOL). When the Mahabaleshwar Committee was asked to report on low-caste recruitment in 1892, the fate of these soldiers seemed already decided.

The exclusion of Mahar and Mang combatant soldiers from the Bombay Army after 1892 and their return to village or local camp life as army-educated military pensioners created a network and early ideology for the emergence of organized demands for social and occupational rights for *dalit* community members. The Mahar military pensioner Gopal Baba Valangkar (19th Bombay Infantry) organized these activities through the Anarya Dosh Pariharak Mandal in Dapoli, Ratnagiri District, in the 1890s. The Mahar military pensioners of Satara District were coordinated in the 1890s by Shivram Govind Waiker Master. Papana Jalliah Thadaye, R. G. Naik and M. Lingaya Naidu promoted Mahar recruitment in association with the Depressed Classes Mission Society in Belgaum, and Ganpat Govind Rokade (17th Bombay Infantry) worked with the Mahar community in Ahmednagar. Above all, there were the activities of Shivram Janba Kamble in Pune in the first two decades of the twentieth century. All these groups drew their supporters, interrelationship, and ideological outlook from a nexus of army-educated *dalit* military pensioners who looked to the vindication of the Mahar martial tradition and promotion of its wider socioeconomic implications as one of their fundamental aims.

The first petitions promoting the Mahar martial tradition and demanding Mahar (and Mang) civil rights came from Shivram Govind Waiker Master, a retired army officer in Satara, in 1894 and 1895, but the Bombay government refused to interfere with its 1892 decision (*Bombay Revenue Dept.* 1895, 77 [Petitions], MSA). The *dalit* leader B. R. Ambedkar testified to seeing a further petition to government in 1892 by his father, Subhedar-Major Ramji Sakpal (2nd Grenadiers) in Ratnagiri District, but this petition is now lost (Longer 1981, 18). Likewise, in May 1894, Gopal Baba Valangkar and other military pensioners of the Dapoli Anarya Dosh Pariharak Mandal declared their intention of drawing up a Marathi petition to the Commander-in-Chief of Bombay Presidency. The Mahar military pensioners, however, felt apprehensive that such a petition might cause the government to suspend their pensions, and the petition was not delivered (*Dina Bandhu*, 20 May 1894, 7 April 1895). Nonetheless, on 4 March 1895, the Mandal met again under the presidency of Subhedar-Major

Ramchandraji Talasurakar and Subhedar-Major Bahadur Kopadkar (treasurer), and a draft petition by Valangkar (secretary) was approved and sent to the Bombay government by the Mandal's chairman, Gangnak Sangnak, on 6 March 1895 (Valangkar 1895). In communicating the petition to the Government of India, the Bombay government showed much sympathy for the economic difficulties of the Mahar ex-soldiers and even went as far as to indicate that the Mahar soldiers were much more deserving and martial than their Aryan Maratha countrymen:

In respect of physique and powers of endurance, the men of the low castes, such as Mahars, Mangs and Ramoshis, are as a rule superior to, whilst, in regard to mere pluck and courage, they are at least the equals of, the bulk of the men of better caste and higher social status, and their loyalty and devotion are unquestioned and have been established incontestably in many historical instances.

(*Bombay Revenue Dept.* 1896, 77, MSA)

The arrival of a further petition in 1901 from military pensioners Subhedar-Major Ramnak Chawnak (20th Bombay Infantry), Haveldar Gopal Krishna (19th Bombay Infantry), and Subhedar M. Mehtor Deolekar (20th Bombay Infantry), president and members respectively of the Dapoli Anarya Dosh Pariharak Mandal, further testified to the economic hardship that exclusion from army employment was creating among their community. Not only had many Mahar ex-soldiers lost their hereditary village lands (*vatans*) by their absence in the army, but they were discriminated against in their applications for other work in Bombay mills and factories, the police force, and as messengers in government service because they were considered untouchable (*Bombay Education Dept.* 1901, 33 [Petitions], MSA). Nonetheless, the Government of India again refused to make any alteration to its martial-race classifications.

In the early 1900s, the organizational activities of Shivram Janba Kamble based in the Pune Cantonment took the movement for Mahar readmission to the army to a much wider scale. Kamble organized two mass Mahar meetings. The first was a two-day meeting at Saswad in Pune district on 24-25 November 1903, resulting in another petition to the Bombay government which requested Mahar military service and was signed by 1,588 Mahar military pensioners. The meeting was combined with an extensive village tour explaining the purpose of the petition to Mahar villagers (*Bombay General Dept.* 1904, 87 [Petitions], MSA). The petition itself was supported by strong criticism of the Bombay government's exclusion of *dalit* soldiers in Marathi newspapers such as *Sudarak* (14 November 1904). The Bombay government replied that such military affairs now fell outside their jurisdiction, and so in 1905 a second petition was forwarded to the Government of India. Yet again the government refused to take action.

A second Somavanshi Mahar Conference was held at Jejuri in Pune District during the annual Khandoba pilgrimage on 5 April 1909. The meeting was attended by many leading *dalit* activists, and it was resolved to send a third petition, this time to the Secretary of State for India, the Earl of Crewe, and other leading politicians in London (Navalkar 1930, 34-43; *Somavanshiya Mitra*, 1 April 1909, 3; *Bombay General Dept.* 1912, 94 [Petitions], MSA). Like the previous petitions, the essential requests were for fair employment and appointment of *dalit* employees in government departments, their readmission to the Bombay Army, and increased recruitment in the police. They argued that if the government felt that caste prejudice was too deeply engrained in the army to allow their employment alongside other castes, a separate Mahar company or battalion should be formed to circumvent this caste prejudice (as with the Mazhbi Sikhs of the 23rd, 32nd, and 34th Pioneers). The conference itself

received a great deal of attention within the Mahar community as a consequence of local meetings to publicize the conference resolutions and to collect petition funds, such as that in Panvel, Kolaba District in May 1909 (*Somavanshiya Mitra*, 1 July 1909, 7). The petitioners were, however, again unsuccessful.

To reinforce their petition demands, the *dalit* military pensioners also reconstructed their own martial history of kshatriya *naukari* into a *dalit* martial-race ideology. This *dalit* ideology recontextualized in racial terms the pre-1880s recruitment ethic of inclusive or open-status kshatriya *naukari* in the Bombay Army and challenged the Marathas' exclusive claims to the military identity of a kshatriya martial race. This racial refocusing of Mahar-kshatriya *naukari* had been partly begun by Jotirao Phule in the mid-nineteenth century. As early as 1869, Phule, in his *pavada* on Shivaji, had likened Shivaji to the pre-Aryan King Bali, who fought against the Aryan invader Parashuram. Phule had sought to assimilate Shivaji as the descendent of an ancient Non-Aryan race of kshatriyas which had been overthrown by Aryan invaders. Phule wrote:

The child [Shivaji] of the mighty kshatriya warriors in the Treta Yug in the time of the Yavanas [Muslims].

Courageous by nature, he was feared in battle, he fought ceaselessly for his country. Twenty-one times, one after the other, such a great force clashed with Parashuram [destroyer of kshatriyas].

Such great warriors were called maha-ari [great enemies].

They made the sons of the Dvijas [Aryans] tremble in fear.

But depriving them of learning when they were defeated, the Dvijas called them maha-ari [Mahars] and Mangs.

The Dvijas took cowardly revenge of their conquered enemy, like a snake, the son of ingratitude.

([1869] 1969, 6)

Phule's *Priestcraft Exposed* (1869) also described King Bali's pre-Aryan kingdom as a martial race of Non-Aryan kshatriyas:

Many foot soldiers, strong horses, the archers no less skilled, their spears bound to their shoulders;

They fought both with diplomacy and with arrows. The wrestlers fought roughly in battle.

The many took care to preserve the unity of their forces.

If small princes faced difficulty, they would come swiftly to their help.

Power was exerted gently, the happiness of heaven pales in comparison.

([1869] 1969, 46)

Phule argued that kshatriyas were known by this name because they lived and worked as farmers on agricultural land, or *kshetra*. Shivaji's tradition of kshatriya *naukari* (whereby peasant farmers were mustered as infantry by *patils* and *deshmukhs* after the rains and agricultural duties) was thus projected back into a pre-Aryan past and conflated with the history of King Bali to create a Non-Aryan racial heritage based on kshatriya *naukari*. In *Slavery* (1873), Phule then described how "the Aryan progenitors of the present Brahman race" were attracted by the prosperous kingdoms of King Bali's Non-Aryan kshatriyas and subjugated this benevolent civilization in a series of invasions. The Aryan conquerors and their Non-Aryan kshatriya opponents were misrepresented in the Aryans' *Bhagavat Purana* as the ten divine incarnations of Vishnu against demonized Non-Aryan enemies. In reality, however, the Aryan

conquerors Brahma and Parashuram were not gods, but tyrannous historical invaders who sought to extirpate Bali's kingdom of Non-Aryan kshatriyas (Phule [1873] 1969, 95–118). Phule summed up the nemesis of the Non-Aryan kshatriyas in *Priestcraft Exposed* (1869):

Lawless men conspired together and made Brahma their leader.  
 They plundered and caused violent chaos, attacking the people and reducing them into subjection.  
 Many respectable people were made into slaves.  
 See these [defeated] people became the Shudras [the fourth *varna*].  
 The remainder, a tiny number, challenged Parashuram . . . .  
 This maha-ari [great enemy] caused Parashuram great difficulties. Many women became widows.  
 Parashuram crushed this great enemy. In constant fighting, he broke them down.  
 He did not spare pregnant women. He killed their new-born children.  
 The maha-ari of the Dvijas came to the end of their endurance, reduced into a living hell.  
 Those that were left were punished severely and abused as Mangs and Maha-ari [Mahars].  
 Behold, the kshatriyas of ancient times.

([1869] 1969, 46–47)

Drawing substantial inspiration from Phule and other writers, such as Baden-Powell (1896), the Mahar leaders Kamble and Valangkar sought to elaborate further Phule's conflation of kshatriya *naukari* with a Non-Aryan martial-race heritage (Valangkar 1895; Navalkar 1930, 103). Like Phule, Kamble claimed that Mahar kshatriya forefathers in pre-Aryan times had been kings of independent agricultural peoples with their own laws, religion, social customs, and all the military virtues characteristic of a martial race. These Non-Aryan people rose up in arms against the Aryan invaders and were called "maha-ari" (great enemy), from which the name Mahar derived (Navalkar 1930, 140). The defeat of these Mahar kshatriyas was not, however, a consequence of Aryan martial valor, but the result of the Non-Aryan kings' adherence to virtue in the face of Aryan guile and deceit. In his Marathi speech at Nagpur in 1920, Kamble narrated that the Aryans had been faced with inevitable defeat since the Non-Aryan guru Shukra was using the Sanjavani mantra to restore to life fallen Non-Aryan warriors, like Bali. The Aryan guru Brhaspati sent his son, Kach, to become a disciple of Shukra in order to learn the Sanjavani mantra from the Non-Aryan Shukra. Discovering Kach was a spy, the Non-Aryan Asuras warriors killed Kach many times to prevent him from learning the Sanjavani mantra, but Shukra's daughter, Devayani, had a great affection for Kach and persuaded her father to repeat the Sanjavani mantra each time and bring him back to life. Finally, the Non-Aryan Asuras warriors killed Kach, mixed his ashes with wine, and gave the wine to Shukra to drink. When, at the intercession of Devayani, Shukra tried again to bring Kach back to life, he heard Kach's voice emanating from his own stomach. Knowing that when Kach came out of his stomach, his own body would be fatally injured, Shukra saw no alternative but to impart the Sanjavani mantra to Kach so that Shukra could be restored to life afterwards. On hearing the mantra and being reincarnated, Kach refused to marry Devayani, claiming the daughter of his preceptor was in the relation of a sister to him, and left with the mantra for the Aryan side (Kamble 1920, 3). Thus, although the Non-Aryan "Maha-ari" and their Mahar kshatriya descendants had been equal and even superior in moral and martial heritage to their Aryan conquerors, they were cheated out of their martial heritage by Aryan

cunning. Driven into mountain strongholds, they were subjugated by the Aryans into untouchability and slavery. Although their kings Hiranyakashipu, Banasura, Prahlada, Bali, Ravan, Indrajit, and Dundubhi had been subsequently stigmatized as tyrant demons, in reality they had been courageous and righteous kings of a race of Non-Aryan kshatriyas who had been “brave and chivalrous,” “jealous of their honour,” and “free and members of the ruling race” with “devotion to their chiefs” in their fight against Aryan tyranny (Kamble, 18 December 1903, in Navalkar 1930, 39–41).

Valangkar sought to subvert Aryan martial ideology by a different means: that is, by attacking the Aryans’ claims to high-caste Aryan status in a more recent timeframe. He argued that Marathas, like Rajputs, were kshatriyas, but were descended from Turks who were invited into India by the Dravid brahman Shankar to eliminate Buddhists and Jains (presumably in the eighth century) and subsequently had been assimilated into Hinduism. Their intermarriage with low-caste women led to the formation of the lower-caste Maratha-kunbis. The allegedly Aryan Chitpavan brahmans who oppressed Konkani Mahar society were not Aryans at all, but actually Semitic immigrants who fled Africa and were shipwrecked on the Malabar coast of south-west India, where the loss of their women forced them to marry local low-caste women and become fishermen. After Shivaji’s death, with the help of his Maratha successors in the Bhosale dynasty, the Chitpavan brahmans took state power in the eighteenth century and hid their foreign origins and low-status by tyrannizing others with untouchability. Mahars had originally been Non-Aryan kshatriyas, but they had been deprived of their kshatriya status and subjected to untouchability as a result of eating carrion to stay alive during the Mahadurgadevi famine of 1396 (Valangkar’s date). After Shivaji’s death, the Chitpavan brahmans of the Peshvai confirmed this untouchability (Valangkar 1894, 2).<sup>11</sup> Contesting exclusive Aryan racial ideology with an inclusive Non-Aryan kshatriya racial ideology, Valangkar and Kamble proposed the argument which was echoed by many Bombay officers, namely that Aryan Marathas were not to be assumed to be a superior martial race of kshatriyas merely because their popular culture made this claim on the basis of their Aryan origins in ancient India. In the same way, the Mahars and other *dalit* communities were not to be assumed to be martially inferior non-kshatriyas merely because they were said to be of Non-Aryan racial origin.

In spite of this *dalit* orchestration of their martial-race heritage and its expression through petitions and meetings requesting occupational and social rights, the Indian army stereotype of the martial races based on elite Aryan kshatriya values continued to dominate until the 1914–18 war. The 1914–18 war brought renewed efforts from the Mahar community to enter the Indian Army. Vitthal Ramji Shinde, the Hindu reformist leader of the Depressed Classes Mission, petitioned the Bombay government in a speech in March 1916 to re-employ *dalit* soldiers in the army. R. G. Naik and Papanna Jalliah Thayade of the Belgaum Depressed Classes Mission, Ganpat Govind Rokade from Ahmednagar, and Shivram Janba Kamble from Pune also held a united meeting in Belgaum in October 1916 to petition for Mahar military service (*Depressed Classes Mission Society* 1916, 3–4). Pressed by the escalation of war in 1917–18 and a need for soldiers, the Government of India finally removed the prohibition on Mahar military service in February 1917, and Mahar recruitment meetings were held in Bombay in July and in Pune in September 1917, organized by G. P. Devadhar (Devadhar 1917a; *Times of India*, 9 July 1917). At these meetings, Devadhar appealed

<sup>11</sup>Gordon dates the Mahadurgadevi famine in 1630–32 (1998, 46), Zelliot in 1676 (1996, 91).

Table 3. Mahar Recruitment to 111th Mahars, 1918–22

	Mahar Officers	Total Officers <sup>a</sup>	Mahar NCOs	Total NCOs	Mahar Private Soldiers	Total Private Soldiers	Total Officers-Soldiers
1918	5	14	43	52	915	923	989
1919	6	12	168	181	1,674	1,683	1,876
1920	9	18	87	95	708	717	830
1921	10	21	73	78	744	751	850
1922	10	21	90	95	664	672	788

<sup>a</sup>The majority of the remaining officers and NCOs were Muslim with some Konkani Maratha and Christian officers.

(not without much hypocrisy) to the military tradition of the Mahar kshatriyas at Koregaon in 1818 and stressed how the Government of India valued the Mahars' martial tradition (Devadhar 1917b). On behalf of the Bombay government, P. Cadell said that "if Mahar people gather to do our work at this time, they will earn the respect and gratitude of people for it, and gain great dignity in their own community" (Khairmode 1968, 1:233). Four companies of Mahars were raised, mostly from the Konkan, and formed into the 111th Mahar Infantry, (*Kesari*, 5 March 1918), as the recruitment statistics in Table 3 reveal.

The 111th Mahars fought at Zhob in Waziristan in 1920 on the North-West Frontier (Rokade 1922) and then moved to Mesopotamia. The company was subsequently amalgamated with the 71st Punjabi Regiment, which had a Christian contingent, but in 1922 they were returned to India and disbanded to much protest in the Marathi press (*Bombay Vernacular Press Reports*, 5–10 September 1922). Numerous protest meetings and petitions were organized by R. G. Naik, M. L. Naidu, and Papana Jalliah Thayade in Belgaum (1922), Subhedar Haru Ramji (111th Infantry), C. K. Bhole, R. K. Kadam, S. P. P. Thorat, and S. J. Kamble in Pune (1922), Ganpat Govind Rokade in Ahmednagar (1922), and the Deccan Adi-Hindu Social Club, Pune (1925). Nevertheless, the respect and gratitude of which Cadell had spoken was not forthcoming. It was not to be until the exigencies of the Second World War that another Mahar (Machine-Gun) Regiment was recruited in 1940 at the insistence of the *dalit* leader Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (Thorat 1954, 11).

## Conclusion

Indian military historiography of the last thirty years has with few exceptions relegated *dalit* sepoys to a little explored parenthesis in its analysis, in spite of these *dalit* sepoys' numbers, their military achievements, and the important part they played in the formation of colonial discourses, such as martial-race ideologies. This parenthesizing reflects a wider trend in much recent historiography on orientalist discourses of caste, race, and religion, which not only brackets off *dalit* society from consideration, but also marginalizes its ideological relationship to and participation in the development of the discourse of the colonial state (see, for example, Inden 1990; Cohn 1994). Events and ideological trends surrounding the exclusion of Mahar sepoys from the Bombay Army after 1892, however, indicate the crucial, not parenthetical, importance of *dalit* sepoys and their martial ideology in the history of nineteenth-

century western India. Such events and ideological trends are important because they bring to the foreground of military historiography the ideological perspectives of *dalit* sepoys in the process of reconstructing their martial tradition of open-status kshatriya *naukari* into a Non-Aryan (Mahar-kshatriya) martial ideology with which to counteract the racial elitism of Aryan (Maratha-kshatriya) martial perspectives. Such ideological developments are also important for the historiography of orientalism, because they suggest that martial-race discourse was less a strategic invention and imposition of the British military establishment in India, than a late nineteenth-century expression of a much longer-term indigenous trend of Indian social differentiation in western India, in which the Marathas and Mahars played critical roles. Above all, however, it is the kshatriya nature of this indigenous discourse, with its Maratha and Mahar voices, which is important to understanding the structure of the Bombay Army in particular, and colonial knowledge formation and social change in western India in general.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in kshatriya kingship, but most of these studies see kshatriya ideology and concomitant caste structuring and practice as predominantly a pre-British colonial phenomenon (Richards 1978; Stein 1980; Inden 1986, 1990; Dirks; 1987, 1992; Quigley 1993). In his study of ritual kingship in south India, for example, Nicholas Dirks has argued that British colonial rule continued a process of brahmanization of the Indian social structure started in precolonial rule. In this process, brahmanic rise to sociopolitical preeminence over kshatriya kingship created a “hollow crown” devoid of political power, and the depoliticization of caste from a political structure of the kingly state to a socioreligious hierarchy of civil society dominated by high-caste brahmans (1987). In western India, historical descriptions (for example Lele 1990) suggest a similar trend of brahmanization under the eighteenth-century Peshvai and its continuation under British rule as a means of depoliticizing and demilitarizing any would-be royal contenders. Although the crown became hollow, this article however highlights that an ethic based on kshatriya ideology in the service of a king/queen appears to have lived on through the nineteenth century as a social discourse, a most notable expression of which was the ethic of kshatriya *naukari* that found expression in Mahar and Maratha martial ideology until the early twentieth century.

The foundation of this kshatriya social discourse as it was conceived in nineteenth-century Mahar popular culture was that Mahar kshatriya *naukari* in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century western India had taken many Mahars and Mangs beyond the confines of untouchability (often in infantry service for Maratha families). Moreover, at times it had led some Mahar warriors to a more elevated sociopolitical status in terms of honors, offices, land rights, or other privileges that reflected their martial achievement and *naukari* for the king (often as a member of a horse-troop). In the early Bombay Army, with the concentration of military *naukari* on infantry service, Mahar and Mang soldiers were confirmed as *nak* and *raut* foot-soldiers, as they had largely been in Shivaji's early infantry. Mahar popular culture perceived, however, that military *naukari* in the early Bombay Army had maintained Shivaji's allegedly inclusive, open-status ethic in which military service continued to confirm an assumed or associated kshatriya warrior status and privilege. In direct contradiction of brahmanic definition of Mahars' and Mangs' nineteenth-century social status in terms of religious defilement, it seems to have been axiomatic in Mahar popular culture that their identity was focused on an occupational and social association with the warrior/kshatriya culture of late Muslim rule and the Maratha rule of Shivaji in the seventeenth century. Mahar popular culture looked back to and sought to perpetuate a time of

heroic warriors from the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries: warriors such as Amrutnak, Khandanak Ramnak Mahar, Yesaji Naik, and Sidnak Mahar, whose excellence in the warrior culture of their times had led to wealth and sociopolitical status. By drawing on this warrior characterization, Mahars in the late nineteenth century sought to convey the martial nature of their history and to confirm their historical association with a tradition of kshatriya status, kingship, and state structure, which (as they perceived it) stood in opposition to brahmanic caste structure. Nineteenth-century Mahar and Mang sepoys were not, therefore, attempting kshatriya-ization by emulating the kshatriya tradition of others, as Cohen suggests (1969). Rather, their culture represented their precolonial participation in older forms of kshatriya identity, which they sought to turn into a contestatory consciousness against the growing dominance of the brahmanized social hierarchy of colonial Indian society.

The increase in Maratha cavalry recruitment in the mid-nineteenth century and the promotion of martial-race ideas by high-caste Maratha kshatriya lineages after the 1880s led, however, to the emergence in the Bombay Army of a slow process of closure of open-status kshatriya *naukari*. This closure reflected longer-term social trend toward gentrification of Maratha *patils* and *deshmukhs* across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The closure had been mitigated to some degree by Maratha demilitarization after the British defeat of the Peshvai in 1818 and by the initial refusal of many high-caste Marathas to accept recruitment in the Bombay Army. In consequence, the early nineteenth-century Bombay Army remained an open-status kshatriya *naukari* army of diverse castes and classes. Inflection into Maratha popular consciousness of brahmanic concepts of hierarchy and higher-caste purity from the Peshvai and a brahmanic conceptualization of Indian social structure under British colonial rule, fostered, however, a revival of the trend toward higher-status Maratha gentrification as Marathas began to become consolidated in the Bombay Army in growing numbers in the 1880s. Moreover, racialized Aryan/Non-Aryan interpretations of Indian history and social structure found growing appeal among Marathas as a means of bifurcating earlier open-status/inclusive kshatriya categories that had linked them with lower-castes, and as a means of challenging the Marathas' subordinate position in the brahmanized *varna* hierarchy of colonial rule. From being a precolonial political form of state organization with a related panoply of martial support groups (such as the associated-Maratha *jatis*, Mahars, and Mangs), kshatriya identity thus became disassociated from the lower castes and was promoted in Maratha popular culture as a smaller set of Aryan Maratha lineages which claimed to be racially associated with other Indian (and British) Aryan kshatriyas in a military *naukari* elite that challenged kshatriya subordination in the caste hierarchy.

Development and promotion of their Aryan kshatriya martial-race status by a Maratha kshatriya caste group and its bifurcation of earlier inclusive kshatriya *naukari* categories, also fostered a racially stereotyped and caste-bound perspective of "untouchable" society which increased discrimination and exclusion on the grounds of untouchability in late nineteenth-century colonial Indian society. Under the precolonial Peshvai, brahmanic orthodoxy had viewed Mahars and Mangs as a subhuman antithesis of their own semidivine status and spiritual consciousness. As racial constructions emerged in Maratha consciousness in the late nineteenth century, racialized reconceptualization of Hindu history and social structure served to corroborate this precolonial, brahmanic attribution of non-humanity to Mahars and Mangs with explanations of conquest and racial otherness. Mahars and Mangs were thereby turned into the subjected racial as well as spiritual antithesis of high-caste Aryans. The exclusion of Mahar and Mang soldiers from the Bombay Army in 1892,

and the return of many to stigmatization in village social and occupational life, closed the occupational exception of open-status kshatriya *naukari* to their defiled occupational status in the colonial economy. Rather than progressively moderating the practice of untouchability in western India, many high-caste Hindu and British colonial officers/officials contributed to the consolidation of a stereotype of the “untouchable” (essentialized primarily in ritualistic religious and racial terms) as a member of a permanently defiled community at the lowest margin of the Hindu social hierarchy. In this colonial process, a static *jati* stereotype of “untouchables,” a more rigidly defined “untouchable” community, and an inferior moral, social, and racial value emerged more categorically as a characterization of “untouchable” identity within Indian society under late nineteenth-century British colonial rule.

This colonial stereotype of untouchability was not, however, either hegemonic or uncontested in western India. For *dalit* military pensioners, the Aryan/Non-Aryan classification severed their association with a warrior culture in which they perceived that their occupations had been militarily important and in which they had achieved social esteem for their martial achievements. It redefined them as a subjected and degraded race with a religiously defiled status on the social margins of a disarmed and sedentary colonial state. Consequently, early *dalit* leaders sought to combat their decline in social status by constructing a counter-ideology that syncretically absorbed the racial paradigm of colonial rule into their precolonial kshatriya ideology. Kshatriya ideology thereby also became a radical discourse for sociopolitical change among Mahars. As racial conceptualization of Indian history became increasingly prevalent as a validation for brahmanic social structure in the 1880s and 1890s, kshatriya/warrior histories of Muslim and Maratha rule also became part of a wider Non-Aryan martial-race tradition stretching backward to the pre-Aryan kings of India and forward to Mahar and Mang soldiers’ participation in the British Indian Army. *Dalit* leaders used this racial contextualization of kshatriya-related Mahar and Mang *naukari* to assert the parity of *dalit* martial culture (be it Non-Aryan) with the other (Aryan) martial races. Thereby they sought to challenge the racialized hierarchizing of society which Aryan Maratha kshatriyas were promoting as a means of distancing Marathas from lower castes and substantiating Mahar and Mang untouchability.

At the very moment, therefore, when the racial Aryan/Non-Aryan paradigm of colonialism was being used to authorize and consolidate brahmanic interpretations of Hindu social hierarchy and customs (for example, untouchability), kshatriya forms of the same racial paradigm were being developed both by Marathas to distance themselves socially from lower castes and challenge brahmanic discourse, and by *dalit* leaders in the generation of a radical kshatriya ideology for *dalit* liberation in western India. This agency of *dalit* and Maratha soldiers in counter-cultural identity formation in colonial western India suggests that colonial discourse might more aptly be described as a confluence or absorption of British perceptions (such as racial ideology) into precolonial trends of Indian knowledge, social development, and ideologically motivated practice. It also suggests that there existed alternative discourses of social knowledge and cultural identity within Indian society, such as that focused around kshatriya identity, which were less favored than brahmanic interpretations by many British orientalists and administrators, but which absorbed colonial knowledge (such as racial ideas) to their own social purpose of challenging brahmanic Hinduism and its idiosyncratic concept of caste. In the final analysis, a forceful dynamic not just for *dalit* identity reformation, but also for sociopolitical change under British colonial

rule in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century western India, was provided by this interactive and contestatory process between, on the one hand, Maratha use of Aryan kshatriya (martial-race) ideology to renegotiate brahmanic caste hierarchy and distance themselves from lower castes and, on the other hand, *dalit* racial reconceptualization of their kshatriya *naukari* heritage in order to subvert these caste Hindu paradigms, which were causing the further institutionalisation of their untouchability.

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